My Little Sister
Can Read
漢字 KANJI
Author: Takashi Kajii
Illustrator: Halki Minamura

KUROHA WAS LOOKING AT THE PC SCREEN. SHE WAS READING THE TEXT, IT SEEMED. "WHAT... IS THIS?"
(CH. 2 THE HEISEI EXHIBIT)

GAI ODAIRA
A FAMOUS AUTHOR WHO IS THE STANDARD BEARER FOR THE ORTHODOX LITERARY STYLE. QUITE A REGRETTABLE PERSON OTHERWISE.
KUROHA IMOSE
GIN'S LITTLE SISTER. SHE HAS A TENDENCY TOWARD BEING TSUNDERE BUT IS ALWAYS WATCHING OUT FOR GIN.
YUZU MIROKUIN
A CUTE, KIND GIRL WHO GIN MEETS. SHE'S THE SPITTING IMAGE OF GIN'S FIRST LOVE.
GIN IMOSE
THE MAIN CHARACTER OF THIS BOOK. HE'S IN HIGH SCHOOL AND DREAMS OF BECOMING AN AUTHOR. A HUGE FAN OF ODAIRA-SENSEI.
MIRU IMOSE
GIN'S ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL-AGED LITTLE SISTER. SHE HAS AN INNOCENT PERSONALITY BUT SOMETIMES HAS A SHARP TONGUE.
???
A CUTE LITTLE GIRL WHOSE IDENTITY IS A MYSTERY.

"HEY, GIN-SAN..."
"YES?"
"PLEASE, BE MY BROTHER."
SHE SAID IT SO SUDDENLY...
"HUH?" "WAIT A..."
KUROHA AND I SPUTTERED.
(CH. 4 I WANT TO HAVE ONII-CHAN'S BABY)

Dear English Readers of the 21st Century, This book is a translated edition of *Boku no Imouto wa Kanji ga Yomeru,* which itself is a translation from the original 23rd century Japanese novel *KANJI YOMU IMOUTO,* by Gin Imose. In the story, kanji characters are a prominent feature, and although the main character is unable to read them, the original translator assumed that the reader can read kanji. In a number of places, therefore, I have left the original kanji or Japanese and provided parenthetical translations for the benefit of English readers. Also, in order to maintain some of the authenticity of the original 23rd century work, I have incorporated a number of features of 23rd century English grammar such as honorifics (*san, kun*) and forms of address like *Sensei* and *Onii-chan.* In order to distinguish between sections and words which were left in the original 23rd century Japanese, I have used all capital letters, and have done my best to approximate the orthodox literary style within the confines of 21st century English.

The English Translator Dear People of the 21st Century, This book is a retitled and translated edition of *LILSIS READ KANJI* (by Gin Imose), which was published in the 23rd century. This translation is not literal, and it has been adjusted in order to be more easily readable by 21st century readers. It is important I explain about my use of kanji in the translation.

This is a first-person story, narrated by a main character who cannot read kanji, and yet I have used kanji in this translation. All of these kanji are my own interpretive translation of the original kanji-less text. In the original work, kanji are only used in a very few select places.

And with that, I would like to give my warmest thanks to the original author, Mr. Gin Imose, as well as the many other people involved. Without your cooperation and hard work, this edition would not have been possible.

Chapter 1 - Sensei's Literature

My little sister can read kanji. And that's really quite amazing.

I was riding on a train to TOKYO. FUJISAN was visible from the window, but only for a brief moment before it disappeared from my sight. There was hardly any time to enjoy the scenery given the incredible speeds of current-day trains.

I turned from the window and looked forward. Facing me in the opposite box seat was a girl with long hair.

It was my sister, Kuroha.

Kuroha was fully absorbed in reading a book. I wondered what she might be reading, so I decided to check the cover.

Collection of Web Novels Volume 11 ☆→the hottie 'n' me IN LUV←☆ Original Text Version.

...yikes.

I wasn't able to read the kanji on the cover, but thanks to the phonetic readings written above them, I understood what type of book it was. It was an original text version of an old modern literature novel which was written using a lot of kanji. She was always reading that sort of difficult ancient literature.

"What?" Kuroha noticed me staring and raised her head. With those piercing eyes of hers, she saw right through me.

"I was just thinking how amazing you are, being able to read such a difficult book and all that..."

"Web novels are actually some of the easier works to read from that era."

"Well, no normal person could read them, that's for sure."

As I spoke, I took a second look at Kuroha. My eyes first stopped at her long, combed black hair. It looked soft, and it gleamed. Her face was perfectly defined, with balanced eyes, eyebrows, and nose placed precisely on her face. Even as her older brother, I had to admit her beauty was flawless.

From the neck down her slim, well proportioned body was clad in a classic style: a white blouse and a necktie, combined with a plaid skirt. It was one of those outfits made to look like an old fashioned high school uniform. Her legs were fully covered in black pantyhose, but that wasn't for the sake of fashion; she wore them for another reason. Nothing very important, however.

She was sixteen, one year younger than me. She was often mistaken for being older because she looked and acted quite mature. This tended to upset her, and if you told her "Beautiful people look younger as they get older," she would give you a nasty look for some reason.

Kuroha's gaze returned to her book.

"You sure can read all those kanji." I couldn't help but be impressed.

The current-day Japanese we used didn't have any kanji characters. Kanji had been used in *modern literature, i.e.* literature from the latter half of the 19th century until the latter half of the 21st century. Shortly after that period they fell into disuse.

"Everybody used to be able to read them in the past, you know."

"That's what I've heard, but still, it's not like reading kanji is a skill you can use in normal daily life."

"I feel it's important to carry on the literary traditions," said Kuroha, her face expressionless. "It really would be better if you could read at least a few kanji, Onii-chan. Wouldn't they be useful if you wanted to write a period drama that felt authentic? Those little details are important."

"Well, I don't have any intention of writing anything like that right now."

I wrote, of course. That was what she was referring to.

My dream was to eventually become a professional novelist. I had taken a stab at memorizing some kanji before, but I had barely even scratched the surface. She was right: if I could read and write kanji, that would definitely give me an advantage in writing stories set in the past. Back then, people had actually used kanji in their daily lives, so that would be crucial for a work's authenticity.

At any rate, Kuroha was once again immersed in her book. *What should I do?*

Maybe I should ponder good ideas for a novel.

Without much thought, my gaze wandered toward the screen mounted on the wall in the front of the train, where news headlines were scrolling past.

“MAHOU SHOUJO” STATUE ☆ EXCAVATED!

The scroll went on to explain that a full body statue of a magical girl created 200 years ago had been discovered in TOKYO. It would be kept at the Agency for Cultural Affairs after it had been carefully examined. It seemed the pink costume she was wearing identified her as the main character of a series called *Magical Girl Super Sadie.*

“Looks like they found that magical girl statue that’s been in the news. They say it’s worth 50 billion yen!”

“I see,” Kuroha replied, not even looking up from her book. She didn’t seem to have any interest in it, despite it being a cultural artifact worth 50 billion yen.

The news headlines continued:

USUBI→NOMINATE FOR HOMYURA

...What?!

At first, I thought my eyes were deceiving me.

The Homyura prize is the most prestigious literary award in Japan. There’s no way they could have nominated a book like Usubi *for that!*

“Hey, what’s the matter, Onii-chan?” said Kuroha, looking at me in puzzlement.

“Huh? Oh...” I realized that I had stood up without thinking. I came to my senses and sat back down.

“It said *Usubi* was nominated for the Homyura Prize.”

“I’ve read that one. It’s made quite a stir recently.”

“A book like that isn’t worthy of the Homyura Prize!”

Usubi was a daring, unconventional work which had really turned heads. What was so different about it? The writing style. Usubi didn’t use ☆ or ! or @ symbols. Considering current-day Japanese, that was a considerably daring

choice.

The story also challenged convention. It told the quiet story of a middle-aged main character all the way to old age. There were no sudden twists or ups-and-downs, just stories of that person's everyday life. The theme was "growing old." There were no beautiful women or beautiful girls or beautiful little girls... and no panty flashes, either!

For a current-day work, this is clearly taking literature in a bad direction!

"Personally I think that Odaira-sensei's *LILSIS* ☆ *STAR* deserves to win."

"Ah, that. That would definitely be an archetypical example of the Orthodox style."

Exactly. The Homyura Prize should go to traditional, orthodox literature.

But... Kuroha didn't look pleased, so I pressed on.

"What, you're saying you don't think *LILSIS* ☆ *STAR* is good?"

"I wouldn't say it's bad, but doesn't it just repeat the usual pattern? It's the same as all of Odaira-sensei's other books, you know, with the main character gaining a non-blood-related little sister."

...I had stood up again. But this time I had stood up with a purpose.

"That is exactly what makes it an Odaira-sensei book. How dare you insult the Orthodox style!"

Kuroha shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly. It was times like these I was disgusted with her perfect little face.

"Doesn't *LILSIS* ☆ *STAR* have a number of innovative new plot ideas? Like the little sister's old-fashioned code of honor... In that scene where she's in big trouble in the game of strip rock-paper-scissors, she thinks outside the box and takes off all her clothes ahead of time! She wins with the element of surprise!"

"Why would she just get naked like that? Besides, the whole strip rock-paper-scissors thing came out of nowhere. There was no reason behind it."

Ah... how pitiful.

"Kuroha, you are very intelligent. But you have zero sense for literature. It's a

primary tenet of the orthodox literary style that there be a scene with meaningless nudity, yes? The strip rock-paper-scissors was there to provide a nude situation."

"I could have read that book left, right, or upside down and it still would have seemed completely inconsistent to me."

"You are focusing too much on picky details. It was crucial that they play strip rock-paper-scissors and get naked. That's what makes it *true* literature!"

“I will never be able to understand the type of people who enjoy such logic.”

“H-How dare you say that!” Throwing up my hands at Kuroha’s blasphemy, I plunked back down into my seat. “Honestly! You don’t have nearly enough respect for Odaira-sensei. Why did you even come with me today?”

The two of us were on this train to TOKYO for a very important reason: we were going to meet the great author Gai Odaira.

Born in 2132, he was a currently 70-year-old veteran author whose debut work had been published 50 years ago. Every book he put out was a record breaking hit. He was not only the top author in Japan, but he also had tons of passionate fans overseas. It was said that he was the most widely read author in the world.

I was, of course, just a normal high school student. I had no right to be able to meet a man like that, but a relative of mine who worked at a publishing company had arranged it for me.

Odaira-sensei was the current-day author I respected the most. And I had the opportunity to meet him at his home in TOKYO. It was supposed to just be me going to TOKYO, but my little sister Kuroha had tagged along.

It’s not like she’s a fan of his or anything, so why? Maybe she just wants to meet a famous person.

“I would have preferred to go alone.”

“I didn’t have any other plans.”

“No plans... Don’t you have any friends? Maybe I should go to your classroom and yell out, ‘Please everyone, be nicer to my dear little sister!’”

“Don’t even think about it. If you do that, both you and I are dead.”

“Dead?”

“I’ll be dead to society, and you’ll be clinically dead.”

“Why would I be clinically dead?”

“Because I will have killed you, that’s why.”

Whoa, chill out there.

“I have some friends, okay? Don’t do anything rash.”

“Then why aren’t you hanging out with them?”

“Call it a personal prerogative.”

“Preroga...what?”

“A little sister’s perquisite.”

“Please don’t use fancy words to trick your big brother.”

“I thought I was dumbing it down for you.”

She thinks that’s dumbing it down?! I have even less idea what she’s talking about!

Kuroha muttered disappointedly to herself, then continued. “I was worried you might do something to insult Odaira-sensei. So I’m here to look after you.”

Look after me?! ...Ah, I see now. Kuroha did tend to look out for me.

“I see. So you still think of me as a child. Thank you.” I grabbed both of Kuroha’s book-filled hands with gratitude in my heart.

“H-Hey, stop that!” Kuroha pulled her hands back in surprise.

“But I would be happier as your brother if you would appreciate Odaira-sensei’s books a little more.”

“Odaira’s books are all romantic comedies with *gimai* (non-blood-related little sisters), right? That’s kind of...” Kuroha started to curl her long black hair in her fingers. It was a habit of hers when she got embarrassed.

Yeah... I didn’t know what she was thinking exactly, but I decided to say exactly what was on my mind. “*Gimai* sure are great.”

“Y-Yeah...” she said, looking downwards for some reason.

“2D ones, anyway.”

Kuroha looked up and gave me the evil-eye. “Come on! I can’t believe you can say that about *gimai,* given your situation!”

My situation, huh? But that was precisely why I could empathize so well.

I didn’t answer, and Kuroha started looking a little apologetic.

“I’m sorry... That was inconsiderate.”

“Don’t worry about it. Anyway, we’re almost there.”

The overhead speakers announced that we would be arriving shortly at SHINAGAWA Station. *In only a brief time, I’ll get to meet Odaira-sensei!* I was so overcome with joy that I became light-headed.

After getting off the train at SHINAGAWA, we transferred to a different train to head toward Odaira-sensei’s house. The last stop on our way was called NERIMA Station.

After leaving NERIMA Station, we headed to the rotary and were met with an absolutely huge government billboard. It was filled with an illustration of the current 2D prime minister, the adorable Nyamo-chan. *Her big eyes are so cute!*

Nyamo-chan was the seventh 2D prime minister. Her concept was that she was “The People’s *Jitsumai*” (blood-related little sister), and she was backed with overwhelming support from the *jitsumai* wing of the party. Even I loved her, despite being part of the *gimai* (non-blood-related little sister) wing. Below the billboard, an electronic sign displayed a message from Nyamo-chan: “JAPAN, BE HAPPY!”

Now then, Sensei’s house should be near the station... I looked around the area. As I did, a large, chalk-white house came into view on one of the city corners.

There it is! That’s his house! I gulped in anticipation. My nerves had finally gotten to me. *I must be careful not to be impolite.*

Feeling flustered, I buttoned up my collar. I was suddenly worried about what I was wearing. I tended to wear old school style clothing, just like Kuroha, but I had different tastes. I was wearing a black jacket and pants, in a style that was called “STUDENT UNIFORM.” I had heard that in the Showa era, young men who wished to become authors would wear the STUDENT UNIFORM style with pride.

“Kuroha, do you think what I’m wearing is rude to Odaira-sensei? I’m wondering if I come off as too cool and intelligent...”

“...I wouldn’t worry about that. No matter what you wear, you wouldn’t come across as cool or intelligent. Quite the contrary, in fact.”

“Oh, good,” I said, relieved.

As we approached Sensei’s house, I began to see that the surrounding white wall had illustrations on it. They were pictures of girls.

One, two... All 20 looked like they were in elementary school. I knew every single one of them. Little sisters, one and all.

Since Odaira-sensei’s debut work, all of his books had featured young little sisters, without exception. Those twenty girls were the heroines of his twenty most famous works.

“How many can you recognize, Kuroha?”

“You mean, tell apart from each other? I can tell *LILSIS* ☆ *STAR*’s main character, Rin, but...”

“I win. I know all of them.” I was an Odaira True Believer. Of course I could recognize the illustrations of all his heroines.

“They all look the same to me.”

She has so much to learn...

It was true that they were all elementary school students with twin-tailed hairstyles and a cute ribbon, with the same perfectly proportioned prepubescent body. Superficially they did resemble one another. But I wanted her to look more closely. Each one had their own unique trait. A mole near their mouth, or hair that was 1 cm longer than the others, or the color of the ribbon... To me they were all completely different.

“It’s not just their looks. They all have the same personality, as well.”

That’s not even close to the truth! If I had to list the similarities, it would have been limited to: tending to beg for things, easily getting lonely, being easily embarrassed, putting up a strong front, easily getting jealous, being clumsy, still having bed-wetting issues, saying mysterious things sometimes, and being madly in love with her older brother.

That’s hardly similar at all!

After all, it wasn’t like he just wrote characters that were exactly his own ideal of a little sister. Each time, they had their own character.

“I wonder if I can’t tell the books apart because all the heroines are similar?”

Why, you...! One of these days, that mouth of yours will be your downfall!

Even if you put aside the question of the heroine, the main characters in each work were all totally different from each other. The little sisters were always ten years old, but the main characters were always the same age as Odaira-sensei when he wrote the book, getting steadily older. So in his latest work, *LILSIS ☆ STAR*, the main character was 70 years old.

Tell me you weren’t moved by the scene where she helps put in his dentures!

“Don’t just focus on the characters by themselves. You should think about the relationship between the main character and the little sister.”

“Sure, whatever.”

What’s with that attitude of hers? If you keep making fun of me like that, I’m gonna get angry at you for real!

“...and who might you be?”

A head had appeared from behind the gate. I would remember those as the first words he had ever spoken to me. He looked at us with some suspicion.

It’s really him.

There he was, the real Gai Odaira, standing before me. He looked exactly like his author portrait. He had a head of white hair and a nice-looking beard to match, and wore a pair of classic black-rimmed glasses. I could see his eyes behind the lenses, sharp and dignified.

“How do you do? My name is Gin Imose.” I used my full name to introduce myself.

As I did, he began to stroke his beard and looked up to the side as if in thought. “Was I scheduled to have a visitor today...?”

Oh, no! Could there have been a mix-up in the scheduling? Sensei looked at us doubtfully, but...

“Hmm. Could you excuse me for a second?” Furling his brows, he placed his hand up to his ear. As if listening to someone’s voice, he nodded in confirmation.

Perhaps he had a small communications device in his ear.

“Ah, sorry about that. I seemed to have forgotten, but my little sister remembered for me. Yes, that’s right. It was today.” Sensei began to smile welcomingly, and opened his arms toward us.

Seems like he’s inviting us in! That’s a relief...

“This is my little sister, Kuroha.” I adjusted myself to one side and introduced my sister, who was standing behind me.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Kuroha.”

“...Ooh. A little sister.” Sensei’s eyes quickly narrowed.

“She is your *jitsumai,* I take it?”

I took a deep breath. *Why would he ask a question like that? Is she my jitsumai? Well, actually...*

“No. Kuroha and I are not related by blood.” That was the truth. My birth parents had put me in foster care soon after I was born, and I had been adopted by my new family. It wasn’t something I liked to talk about with people.

“A *gimai*, you say?” He almost snarled at us.

Huh? Sensei was clearly behaving oddly. His shoulders were almost shaking.

“You dared to bring your *gimai* to see me, the man that is known as ‘*Gimai* Odaira’?” He stared at me with eyes that told me I was his enemy. “Was it your parents remarrying?”

“No, I was adopted when I was a baby.”

“That is pretty rare indeed. And with a little sister involved, to boot.”

“I-I’m sorry...” His fervor was enough to make me instinctively apologize.

Sensei caught himself and his expression softened.

“A-Ah, my apologies. It’s not like I’m jealous of you or anything... Please, come inside.”

It looked like he had calmed down. He opened the door, and gestured for us to come on in.

After excusing myself, I went to step inside.

“Hold it right there,” he said in a low voice, bringing me to a standstill right before I entered. “I’d like to check something. Is she your only little sister?”

Such a sharp mind! I almost shook because of how perceptive he was.

“No, I have another one.”

“And how old is this other little sister?”

“Ten years old.”

“T-Ten years old?!” His face twisted into a freaky smile. “Don’t tell me that you’ve been asked to help her when she’s wet the bed...”

“Yes, I have. She was worried that if she told our parents or Kuroha, she’d get yelled at...”

There was a loud *bam!* Sensei had kicked the door.

“Ooooooooh!” His face was turning more and more red. It seemed like any moment, steam would come out.

“A ten-year-old little sister that wets the bed!” Tears were streaming down his cheeks, and he took something out of his pocket that looked like a cellphone.

“Hello? Is this Choumabayashi? This is Odaira.” He began to speak, as we stood there in stunned silence. “There’s a boy I’d like you to return to a baby.”

What in the world is he talking about?

“He’s got *two gimai*, and one of them is ten years old! Can you believe it? I don’t think I can take it. Return him back to being a baby, and then they’ll all be his *older* sisters.”

As he was speaking, I had a revelation.

Choumabayashi... Could that be Professor Choumabayashi, the scientist? She was a genius, and had had a string of successful never-before-seen experiments.

As Sensei hung up, he looked at me with a slight grin. But his eyes were dead serious.

“Gin-kun, you might get a chance to experience something no human has

before. You can contribute to the progress of science!”

An experience no human has experienced before! The progress of science!

“Kuroha!” I looked at her gleefully. Perhaps she wasn’t able to grasp what was going on, as she had completely stiffened up.

“I’m so honored!” I cried. I was going to experience something extraordinary! I was sure it would be a wonderful source of inspiration for my novels.

“Sensei!” I threw myself upon the ground before him. *Here was a man who should be gazed upon only from below!*

“I have many good friends. They are all top class in their fields.” Sensei stared at me, tears in his eyes. “That includes politicians, and I’ll have them institute a *gimai* tax. And I won’t exempt minors, either. *Gimai* are the ultimate luxury, after all. And such luxury should be taxed accordingly.”

“Magnificent... Thanks to our meeting today, Sensei, all of society will change! This was indeed a miraculous encounter!”

“...You’re mocking me, aren’t you?”

“Of course not! I am truly overjoyed. I might be able to come up with an idea for my novel that will win the Newcomer’s Prize if I have this incredible experience! Thank you so much!”

With anger in his voice, he pounced. “Newcomer’s Prize? What nonsense. You have angered me. I will make sure no publisher ever allows you to debut! Consider your road to being an author blocked!”

Eh? Sensei’s words ran on repeat in my head. *My road to being an author... blocked?*

Before I had even realized it, his mood had completely soured! His influence spread throughout the entire literary world, so it would be trivial for him to stop me from being published.

At this rate, I’ll never become a novelist! I was about to fall into complete despair.

“Wait a moment!” Kuroha rushed in front of me as I lay on the ground, her black hair swinging back and forth.

“I know you must be angry, but please look at this.” Kuroha took out her cellphone and showed the display to him. “This is my little sister Miru.”

Judging from what she said, I gathered she was showing him a picture of Miru.

“If you can calm your anger, we will bring her here and make her call you ‘Onii-chan.’”

The second she said that, he froze.

“Oh...?” Sensei smiled as if in a dream. “Onii-chan... I like the sound of that.” His mouth was half open, and drool was flowing out. He was an elderly man, so perhaps he suffered from an inability to control his mouth muscles properly. *Must be difficult for him.*

He stood there for a moment, out of it, but then he quickly straightened his face.

“It’s a promise!” he shouted, pointing straight at Kuroha.

“But let’s not talk outside all day. Come on in,” he said, seemingly having regained his composure. He spun around and headed into the house.

Phew... Looks like I dodged a bullet there.

“Thank you very much. Come on, Onii-chan, stand up already.”

As I stood, Kuroha leaned over and whispered in my ear. “I only said we’d bring Miru to see him to get out of that situation, okay? I wasn’t being serious.”

“You what? You shouldn’t be tricking him.”

“If I hadn’t said something, he would have kept boiling over like that. Your dream was this close to being crushed. See, I knew it was a good idea for me to come.”

Maybe I should have been thankful that Kuroha had come along. I started to get a little choked up. *Thanks to Kuroha coming along with me, I was...*

Kuroha left me to my deep thoughts and went inside.

Hey! No fair you get to go in first! I’m the huge fan of his, after all!

We were led to a simply decorated living room with white walls and a white table in the middle. Kuroha and I sat down next to each other on the couch.

“So you are an aspiring author, Gin-kun?”

“Yes,” I replied. I reached into the bag I was carrying, and took out a bundle of manuscripts.

“Actually, I brought some of my work with me, and was hoping you would read it.”

Sensei nodded in acknowledgment, and immediately turned to look at the pages as I handed them over.

I can’t believe that Odaira-sensei is reading my manuscripts! This is like a dream!

After a little while absorbed in reading, he raised his head.

“...Is this written in code?” he asked me, looking thoroughly confused. “It’s almost completely incoherent. Especially the £ symbol. What in the world is that supposed to mean?”

“It’s a pictogram of the heroine running happily with her hands spread out.”

“.....” Sensei was at a loss for words.

“...Gin-kun, you may be the genius we need to break through to the next era of literature.”

Genius?! Oh, my god! Odaira-sensei called me a genius! I was completely on cloud nine.

“Sorry...” Kuroha grimaced sightly and glanced downward.

Huh? Why are you apologizing?

“I’d like to read the rest soon. Well, if I *can* read it.”

“Thank you so much. And could I trouble you for some advice on writing novels?”

“Hmm... advice, you say?” Sensei thought to himself for a brief moment, and then pulled out an article of clothing from under the table.

It was a pair of white panties with a tiny ribbon.

I doubted they were made for a woman. More like a ten-year-old girl.

“What do think these are?”

“Panties.”

“That would seem to be the case.” Sensei turned to Kuroha and asked her, “And what do you see, Kuroha-kun?”

Kuroha stiffened up and replied, “I also see a pair of women’s underwear.”

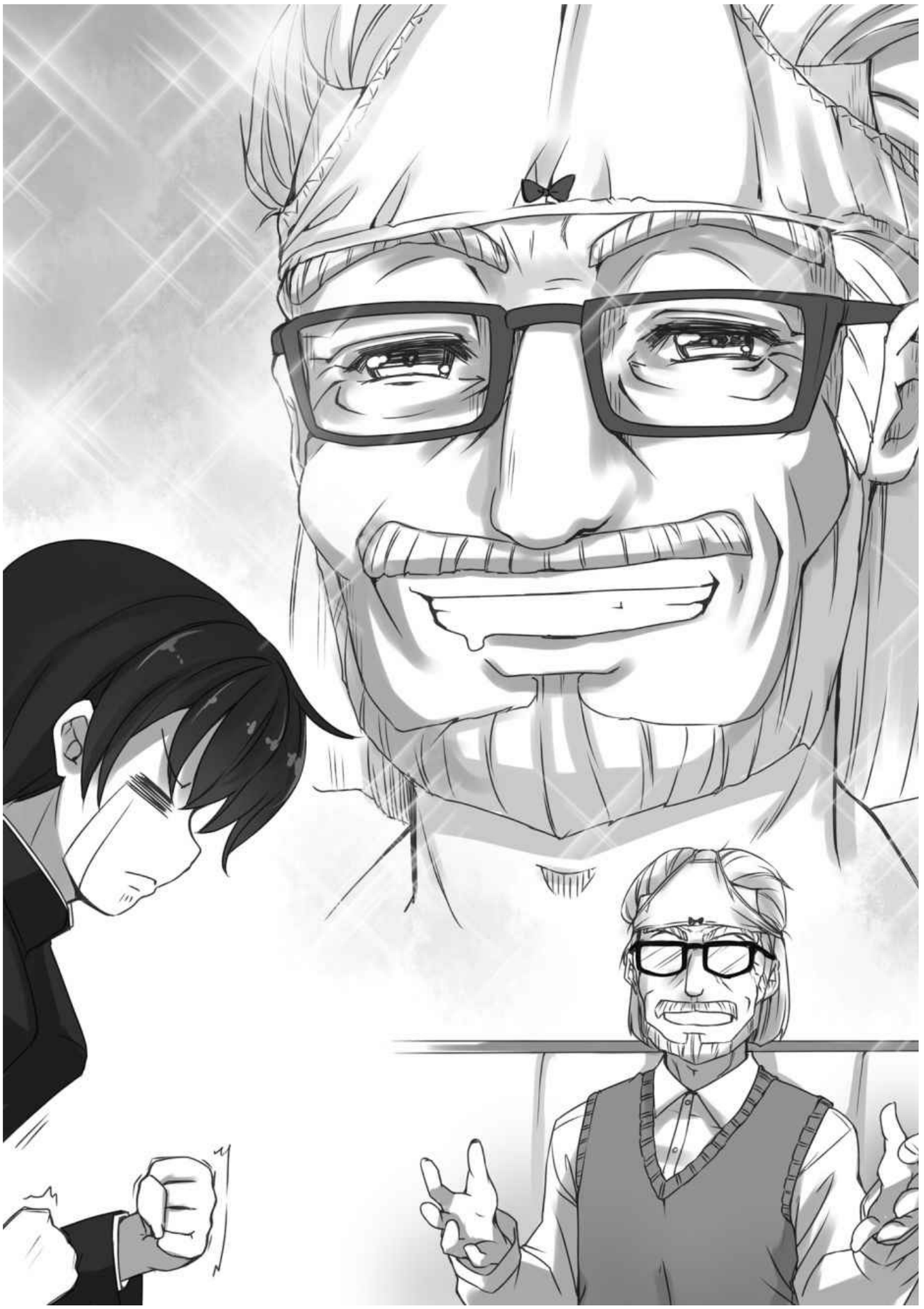
“Exactly. Both of you observed reality. In other words, you explained. But a novel that only consists of explaining is not enjoyable. A novel must *describe.*”

“Describe?”

“Yes... You cannot just write ‘panties’ when there are a pair of panties. You must describe them in a way which captures their essence. For me, I would write ‘a miniature universe in white.’”

A miniature universe! I would have never thought of that.

“You must develop your expressive potential every day,” he said, as he put the panties on his head.



Why did he do that? There doesn't seem to be any logical connection. Ah, I think I get it! After some thought I understood where he was going. Odaira-sensei wanted me to *describe* him wearing panties on his head.

"Okay! I'll think of a description right away!"

But all that sat before me was a gentleman wearing a pair of panties on his head.

I need to think of something stylish and poetic.

"Degenerate," muttered Kuroha beside me.

Why, you... How rude to call him a degenerate! Her description also hardly rose beyond simply explaining what she saw. It wasn't even close to the awesomeness of "miniature universe in white."

At least throw in a "peerless" before "degenerate," sheesh...

As we racked our brains, he sat there grinning with those panties on his head, staring at us.

"So we have an adopted older brother and his *gimai,*? It's just like the situation in *Oniaka.*"

Oniaka, he says?

The full title was *Onii-chan no Akachan Umitai,* which meant "I want to have Onii-chan's child."

It was the great master Kurona Gura's legendary bestseller that had been published in 2060. A landmark work in little sister literature, it had given birth to the spread of moe and the orthodox literary style. According to researchers, it had not only had a huge effect on literature, but on Japanese culture as a whole.

My personal history was very similar to the main character in *Oniaka.* We had both been given up for adoption and gained a little sister.

"*Oniaka* was the novel which inspired me to become a novelist," I explained.

"Oh, I see."

To me, *Oniaka* was no normal book. Thanks to *Oniaka,* I had been able to get over my pain of being adopted when I was a child. The first time I had read it, my

feelings for the main heroine, Homyura Taitei, had moved my heart. I felt like the sun had finally shone down upon my world.

“Homyura will be my favorite heroine for eternity.”

“She is beautiful and admirable, yes. If only she’d been six or seven years younger,” he replied, eyes narrowing. Homyura was sixteen years old in the book.

I couldn’t help but discuss my favorite book. “The opening scene was excellent, don’t you think? As soon as her brother appeared, there was a gust of wind that blew up her skirt.”

“Starting things off with a panty flash!”

“And afterward, it threw in more panty flashes now and then. Wasn’t it neat that you could tell what Homyura was thinking based on the pattern on her panties?”

“Yes. But there is another meaning to the panty flashes in that work, you know.”

“Another meaning, you say?”

“Homyura’s panties also represented the sign of the times when it was written.”

Sign of the times?

“In the first part, Homyura was wearing completely red panties, yes? They represented the suffering the Japanese citizens felt under a crushing tax burden. Gura, the author, wanted to speak out and proclaim, ‘The people are being bled dry and suffering!’”

I had no idea! How frustrating! It seemed like my skills of literary analysis still had a long ways to go.

“A normal reader doesn’t need to read that much into it. ‘Homyura is so cute!’ is enough for most.”

I was a person who aimed to become an author. *I can’t just settle for satisfying normal readers!*

“Kuroha, we just heard something amazing! You have to read *Oniaka,* too!” I said, looking at Kuroha. I was getting excited after learning of this entirely new way of reading my beloved story.

“I hear you,” she replied coolly. Kuroha loved reading, but she had never read *Oniaka.*

I wonder if there is some reason she doesn’t want to read it? It’s such a shame.

“Kuroha, why won’t you read *Oniaka?* Homyura is totally the best.”

“I don’t understand how a fictional character can be ‘the best.’”

“Maybe Kuroha-kun wants to read it less every time you describe how great Homyura is, Gin-kun.”

Kuroha blurted out, “That’s not it!” and started to pout.

“Ha ha ha. Well it was definitely that work that accelerated the spread of moe culture.”

Japan was now the land of moe, but it apparently hadn’t always been that way in the past.

“Although, lately there’s something out of the ordinary getting some attention.” Odaira-sensei quipped, but quickly his expression turned serious. “Have you read *Usubi*?”

Ah... It seemed like he was also pained by what he had read in that book.

“I read it. It’s definitely something *new,* but I wouldn’t call it...”

“There isn’t a single female character in it. And no panty flashes or scenes with stripping, either. The author of *Usubi* seems determined to challenge the idiom, ‘Without panties, there is no literature.’”

I could totally understand why he was so infuriated. How could he not be?

“And to think that book, of all books, would be nominated for the Homyura Prize...”

The Homyura Prize was named in honor of Homyura Tatei, the heroine of *Oniaka,* and was the most prestigious literary award in Japan. Any published

book was eligible, and each year a book in the orthodox, moe style was nominated. And yet, this year this strange book, *Usubi,* had somehow snuck itself a nomination. For literary folk such and Odaira-sensei and myself, we couldn't help but lament the situation. But for a heretic like Kuroha...

"Personally think it's refreshing to have a book where the girl doesn't show her panties."

What a horribly uncultured thing to say.

"Oh? So you think that *Usubi* is worthy of the Homyura Prize, Kuroha-kun?"

"I'm not sure I would go that far, but..."

"For me, I think my main competition for the prize is my rival Haruka-kun's book *My Little Sister Can't Go to the Bathroom Alone,*" Odaira-sensei said.

He was referring to Haruka Haruka-sensei, another big name author. Considered two sides of the same coin of the Little Sister Literary world, they were known as "*Gimai* Odaira" and "*Jitsumai* Haruka" respectively.

Despite its archaic-sounding title, *My Little Sister Can't Go to the Bathroom Alone* was the epitome of a current-day novel. The description of the heroine trying valiantly to hold it in made for a very easy read.

"What did you think of that book, Kuroha-kun?" he added.

Kuroha responded with silence, and did not look pleased. I was well aware of the reason why Kuroha wasn't able to answer the question.

"*My Little Sister Can't Go to the Bathroom Alone* is basically the story of Kuroha when she was little," I said.

As Kuroha's face went flush with embarrassment, she glared at me.

I remembered those days. When Kuroha had been little, she wouldn't go to the bathroom by herself. If Mom and Dad weren't home, she would ask, "Onii-chan, come with me!" and make me follow her to the bathroom door.

"You might not be able to tell now, but Kuroha had a time when she was actually cute, you know."

"Will you stop it already? Why can't you learn to keep your mouth shut?!"

Kuroha complained, her face now red as a ripe tomato.

“I will state my opinion! I must give Haruka-sensei credit for his ability to write a book with that subject matter. But I do think his nomination was a radical choice.”

“Yes, that book almost went into the realm of philosophy. It’s definitely a work of the crazy, radical Haruka-kun of old. It brings me back, really... Back when we were younger, Haruka-kun and I would have some lively arguments in the literary hangout bars in SHINJUKU’s GOLDEN GAI.”

In the literary magazines, the battle between *jitsumai* fans and *gimai* fans had raged on without end. Ever since Odaira-sensei and Haruka-sensei had debuted, they’d been destined to be rivals for eternity. I was certain that Odaira-sensei had no interest in losing to Haruka-sensei when it came to literary prizes.

“Your *LILSIS* ☆ *STAR* is a shoo-in to win, Sensei. It is the most orthodox of all the books that were nominated, so don’t worry!”

“Thank you. It’s one of my best works, if I do say so myself. My little sisters also say it’s very good.”

Kuroha looked like something was off when he said that. “I’ve been wondering since you mentioned them earlier, but are your little sisters at home?”

“Yes, they’re here. All 20 of them.”

“...huh?”

He tapped his head. “They live in here. From my debut work’s Azu to my latest book’s Rin,” he said, putting a hand up to his ear.

He must be listening to his little sisters.

In an interview, he had once said that he often communicated with his little sisters. *So that’s what he meant by that!*

“Uh, oh! Azu is acting very jealous. She doesn’t like it when I swoon over beautiful ladies like you, Kuroha-kun.”

“Uh... ew.” Kuroha’s face turned a slight shade of blue.

“Azu’s been my little sister for 50 years now, and she still doesn’t understand

me. What a troublemaker she is. She should know that high schoolers are out of my range by now!”

“Just in case, I want to clarify something. You are saying you won’t go after kids like me?”

“No, no, that’s backwards. You’re way too old.”

“I am not old!”

Don’t get mad at him! I thought. *He’s saying you’re a beautiful lady, is all.*

He put his hand up to his ear once again and began to smile and nod.

“Oh? You need to go wee-wee? Let’s go to the bathroom, then,” he said, standing up. “Probably should change these out.” Odaira-sensei took off the panties on his head as he left the room.

After he was gone, Kuroha looked at me with an exhausted expression.

“So, his little sisters are always ten-years-old, right?”

“Yup. They’re all ten.”

“Do ten-year-olds say ‘wee-wee’?”

“Why not? It’s very common for two-year-olds, so this gap gives them a unique personality.”

Kuroha had no response to this. Instead, she said, “What do you think of Odaira-sensei, now that you see him acting this way?”

You really ask the strangest questions.

“He’s a *hentai,*” I said.

Kuroha looked a bit relieved. “Yeah, that’s also what I think.”

“A *hentai genius,* that is!”

“What?”

“Being called a *hentai* is a compliment, you know. I must take this opportunity to learn his amazing ways!”

“A-A-A-A-Absolutely no way!” Kuroha said with such force that she stuttered over her words. “You are you, okay? You don’t need to try and copy someone

else. You should aim for your own original style. I think that's for the best."

Yeah, you have a point. One should always aim high.

"You're right," I said, and Kuroha let out a sigh of relief. *I never realized you cared so much about my originality.* It brought a warmth to my heart.

Afterward, we waited quietly until Odaira-sensei returned from the bathroom. But he was taking his time to appear.

"Onii-chan, the author of *Oniaka* only gained recognition after he died, right?" asked Kuroha, perhaps out of boredom.

"That's what I've heard, yes."

"Do you think what he was saying earlier about the pattern of the panties representing the state of Japan is actually true? Seems like he's reading too much into it to me."

"Kuroha," I began, in a surprisingly low voice. "Odaira-sensei said it was so, yes? That the red of the panties was the color of the blood of his countrymen. If that is how he read it, then that is what it means."

"But something doesn't sound right about it."

"Do you have to question *everything*?"

You'll never make any friends this way! I worried about her. As her older brother, I wondered if she needed to be helped along the way to being a more trusting, open person.

Just as I was about to admonish her, Odaira-sensei returned. He was no longer wearing panties on his head.

"Sorry I kept you waiting so long," he said, carrying a bundle of papers in his hand.

I wonder what those are?

"You came on a good day. I was thinking I would let you read some of my brand new work."

"Brand new! Are you sure it's okay?!"

"Yes. It's still incomplete, though, so only the opening section."

“Please, allow me the honor!”

I’m going to be able to read Sensei’s new work before the other 80 million citizens of Japan! I couldn’t believe my amazing luck. “For this work, I am writing a period piece,” he said, sounding self-satisfied.

“A period piece?”

“Yes. It takes place during the beginning of the 21st century, in the Heisei era.” He sat down on the couch, and handed me the first page of the manuscript.

The Heisei era... It had been quite a peaceful time in Japan’s history. Compared to the Showa era and Japan’s participation in World War II, or the Meiji Restoration, it might even seem quite unremarkable. Of course, it wasn’t as if nothing happened. There were natural disasters, and economic downturns, but Japan had recovered quickly.

For him to have chosen the Heisei era as the setting for his new work means that he wasn’t going to rely on some famous historical incident or person, but instead wanted to really focus on the writing itself. *I have a feeling this is going to be a masterpiece.*

With great anticipation, I looked down upon the manuscript.

“I’m late, I’m laaaate!”

Kiyoshi was in a hurry. He shouldn’t have been watching videos on that website the entire night. He’d completely overslept. It was no good to be late on the first day of a new semester.

He ran as fast as he could, taking a shortcut through a park and out onto the main road.

That was when it happened.

He ran into a girl who was running just like him.

“Uwa!”

“Kya!”

He saw her panties as she fell down. They were sky blue. Kiyoshi panicked, and looked away.

“...Owwww.”

“Are you okay?” Kiyoshi asked, offering his hand.

“O-Onii-chan...” she said, looking shocked.

“What?” Kiyoshi was an only child. He shouldn’t have a little sister.

“It hurts...” she said, patting her butt. It seemed like she had bumped it.

“I’ll lick it for you,” suggested Kiyoshi. “If you lick something that hurts, that should make it better.”

“No, thank you,” she replied without hesitation.

Kiyoshi was disappointed. He decided that he would have to settle for fantasizing about licking her butt.

What is this...! This was completely shocking to me.

“Sensei...”

He looked at me with sly smile, pleased with his prank. *You can’t be serious that this is your new work, right?* After all, I...

“I can’t read it.” There were too many kanji.

It wasn’t just that the setting was during the Heisei era... This book was in fact written as a Heisei era novel would have been at the time!

No one in current-day Japan could understand this!

“Fuwahaha... Perhaps I have gone too far.”

“Did you write this yourself, Sensei?”

“Of course.”

Amazing... I had heard that he was able to read kanji, but he can write them, too? No normal author could write modern literature like that. His skills were on par with the best literary historians.

“How were you able to learn all the kanji, Sensei?”

“I wanted to read some modern literature, so that’s why I studied them. FYI, the first kanji I learned were 身体測定 (body measurements).” *Shin-tai-soku-tei. I wonder what they mean? Just hearing him pronounce them makes my head hurt.*

“You’re going to write your next novel in the modern literature style.”

“Oh, hardly. This is just me fooling around a bit. I was trying to get in the spirit of the period, and before I knew it my pen was writing modern literature.” *Oh, so that’s what it is.*

“I have the real one, here,” he said, handing over another manuscript page. This time it looked like current-day literature. *This was, without a doubt, Sensei’s new work!*

“You will be the first person to read it.” *Such an honor. I am not worthy!*

I was moved almost to tears, but I held them back for now was not the time.

The time for crying would come afterward.

With a feeling of great joy, I read the manuscript.

COMESIN→KIYOSHI KIYOSHI: “SO LATES”

WATCH UTUBS SLEEPSIN←DUMDUM

LATE DAY1 ONOS

INPARKOUT

HITGIRL KABAM☆

KIYOSHI: “UWA”

GIRL: “MYA!”

WAWAWA FALLROLL PANTYS KIRARI☆

KIRA KIRA

KIRARI☆

PANTYS→SKYBLUE

KIYO B SHY

GIRL: “OWYOWY”

KIYOSHI: “TAKE HAND PLZ”

GIRL B SHOKKU

GIRL: “O ONIICHAN”

KIYOSHI: “WHA”

KYOSHI NO SISTER, WHYS?

GIRL: “OWOW”

GIRL BUMP RUMP PATPAT

KIYOSHI: “I LICKS IT YES?”

LICKS HEALS PROBS

GIRL: “NOES”

KIYO B DOH

KIYO TOTES WANTS LICK←DREAMING

BUTT LICKY

LICK LICK

LICKY☆

—I wasn't able to hold back my tears.

I was the first person to read a work from Gai Odaira. That alone was more than I could have dreamed, but the content itself was what truly moved me. Just the fact that it was a true and proper Odaira-sensei work made me feel right at home. It was like nourishment taken in from the eyes!

The little sister appears right from page one, and without delay the oh-so-very literary staple, the panty flash... I was still reeling from the experience. This was Orthodox style literature in its most pure form.

What really stood out to me was the use of *KIRARI(flash a light)* instead of *CHIRARI(flash a peak)*. They had not yet invented self-defense glowing panties in the Heisei era, so it was not as if her panties had actually flashed. And yet, he had written it as if they had actually flashed. This was exactly what he had meant when he said that novels must *describe*.

It must mean that the little sister must see the main character as a star of hope! Or perhaps, it could be some commentary about society.

Yes, I was embarrassed to cry, but Odaira-sensei had shown his feelings to me with this story more than any mere words could have expressed. So yes, I cried! I cried without inhibition! *This...*

This is Sensei's literature!

"KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE," he said all of a sudden.

"What?"

"That's the title of my new work."

I replied, still in tears. "KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE."

Profound.

Perhaps this would be a more serious work than his previous books. I had that feeling just from reading the opening scene. This is how I truly felt: with this book, Odaira-sensei will become truly godlike!

"Let me read it." While I was still shaking from emotion, Kuroha snatched the manuscript and began to read it.

Kuroha, it's okay to cry! However after she finished reading I didn't notice any change. She was completely calm.

"I see it starts with a panty flash like many other books. Have you considered any other plot points?

"Kuroha-kun, are you asking me to not drink water? To not breathe the air?"

"I don't believe that answers the question, but..."

"Opening a novel with a panty flash is so crucial, you might as well have asked me those questions instead. If I don't start a book with a panty flash, I lack all motivation to continue to write."

"...I should have known better than to ask."

Kuroha, what is with that reaction of yours? This is terrible! At this rate you are going to grow up into an emotionless adult!

I had made up my mind. On the train ride home I would teach Kuroha about the wonders of Gai Odaira literature. I would tell her in detail about every book!

I think I'll start with teaching her the pattern on the panties of each of his heroines...

☆

Entry May 1st, 2202,

It is not my wont to speak overly of myself to others. But oh, do I so deplore this world.

Every person has someone or something for which they live their lives. As for myself, it is literature. Even from a young age, my toys were letters and from the time I could tell them apart I preferred the pen to the chopstick. I believed, like my ancestor Torahiko Toji, that I would soon give to the world beautiful works of literature. With my gifts as a writer, it should have been no difficulty whatsoever.

But Japanese literature is dead.

Though I knew the horrendous state of literature, somewhere deep in my heart I believed that the spark of proper literature still burned somewhere in this country. I trusted in the goodness of the Japanese people.

Clutching to this final grain of hope, I ventured to a book store. It was my objective to check the nominations for the most prestigious literary award in Japan. Even just a tiny glimpse... All I wanted to see was some sign or signal of another who agreed with me.

GAI ODAIRA, “LILSIS ☆ STAR”

HARUKA HARUKA, “My Little Sister Can’t Go to the Bathroom Alone”

NUSHISAMA, “ANEDARUMA”

TOP OF TOP, “MAGNIFICENT! AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PREPUBESCENT GIRLS”

SAKU KOGURE, “Usubi”

Yes, I had read them all.

But all that they left in my heart was despair.

I could hardly stand reading any of them. They are worth less than dust. Such pinnacles of vulgarity. Only *Usubi* had taken a different direction, but it was still a far cry from the literature I so longed for.

I have come to a realization. There is no place in this literary world for me.

The literature my ancestor Torahiko had written that stretched from the Meiji era to the Taisho era has been destroyed. The beautiful prose... The grand stories... All have vanished. The Japanese people have fallen into depravity, their words have been snuffed out, their culture gone rotten.

Yes, and this all began long, long ago.

I can but drown my sorrows in sake, shedding tears for what has been lost.

Chapter 2 - The Heisei Exhibit

It had been a month since I had met Odaira-sensei.

After that experience, I had finished writing my novel and submitted it for the Newcomer's Prize. It was my fifth entry.

Like *Oniaka* had once done for me, my desire was that my novels would move a great number of readers' hearts – that it would give many people hope. And ever since I had met Odaira-sensei, that wish had grown even stronger.

By exchanging emails, we had become friends. I was so glad that he would always respond, despite being such a busy man.

The emails were mostly about my younger little sister, Miru. He would ask me about her likes and dislikes, her measurements, how often she wet the bed... Detailed questions like that. I was happy to help him with such research for creating new characters.

He was very insistent about meeting Miru. I would have brought Miru to see him sooner, but he never seemed to have an opening in his busy schedule. He wasn't just writing novels – he also maintained a full slate of interviews and lectures.

He had resigned himself to not being able to meet her for a little while, but then he pulled a lot of strings and managed to open up an entire day for us.

"I can't stand it anymore!" he'd said.

And so, walking beside me to the nearest train station was a little girl, my youngest sister Miru. Next to her walked Kuroha. With Miru in the middle, we made the shape of the 川 kanji.

The three of us were heading to TOKYO.

I had promised to bring Miru to see Odaira-sensei the last time we'd met. The day to fulfill that promise had finally come.

Kuroha had complained, "I just said that to get you out of a jam!" and made a

fuss, but it wasn't as if I could betray my promise.

Today, we were not just going to visit his home. He had said he would give us a tour of a history museum he recommended.

I might be able to get some inspiration for my novels from history! I can't wait...

It was all thanks to Miru that I would be able to meet Odaira-sensei once again. I looked over in her direction.

Miru was a fourth-grader in elementary school, and ten years old. She was normal height for someone her age, her head reaching up to the center of my stomach. She had on a cat-eared beret that she was fond of, and was wearing a one-piece dress with a little bag hung across her shoulder.

Her face, as you might expect, resembled that of her sister Kuroha. She had a cool expression on her face, and her eyes and nose were mounted precisely in position.

She'll be quite the beauty when she grows up...

Miru was also reading a book as we walked.

"Miru, that's dangerous," cautioned Kuroha, but Miru paid her no attention, absorbed in her book.

Looking at the cover, there was a picture of a woman. The book was titled *COLLECTION OF LIGHT NOVEL COVERS .*

Light novels were one of the genres of modern literature. It was said that they influenced the Orthodox literary style. It must have been a collection of the cover illustrations for those books. I'd seen them in my art history classes.

Miru asked Kuroha a question without even looking up.

"Hey, what does 憂鬱 (yuutsu/melancholy) mean?"

"It means when you feel down in the dumps."

"And 召喚獣 (shoukanju/summoned beast)?"

"Uh, hmm... Like an animal you call out, maybe?"

"And what's 大魔王 (daimaoh/demon king)?"

“Umm... the leader of the bad guys or something?”

Miru kept asking Kuroha questions and not looking particularly satisfied with the answers. It seemed like she was reading the kanji written on the cover illustrations.

Miru might have been only ten years old, but she could read a lot of kanji already. She picked them up even faster than Kuroha, who was called a child prodigy.

The Imose family had produced generations of linguists and translators, but Miru’s ability with language rivaled that of her greatest ancestors. And she wasn’t just a genius at words, but at drawing as well. As an example, if you were to ask her to draw pictures of characters like the cover illustrations she was looking at, she would be able to without any trouble at all. I almost feared what she might become.

On the other hand, there was myself.

I could not read kanji. I could not even keep up with my sisters’ conversation. I was a mere commoner.

I had frustratingly attempted to learn kanji many times. But it was like they were a completely different language to me. How in the world is someone supposed to memorize not hundreds, but thousands of symbols?! Only a true genius would be able to read and write them.

I did not have the blood of the Imose family running through me. The brain I had been born with was just too different from that of my sisters.

Not being able to read kanji posed no problems for my daily life. But knowing so vividly that I was unrelated to my sisters pained me, and made me feel distant.

“Nii, what’s the matter? You’re making a scary face.”

It seemed like I had gone off into my own little world, and I had a stern look on my face which Miru was now staring at.

“Ah, sorry.”

“Got dumped by a girl?”

What's with that all of a sudden?!

Miru seemed to take my stunned silence as an affirmative answer. "I'll strangle the bitch," she said cooly. Miru was innocent, but had a foul mouth.

"Miru, stop that," Kuroha scolded.

"Aren't you curious, Nee?"

"There's no way he was dumped... or picked up for that matter. That's not in the cards for him."

As it was the truth, I had no rebuttal.

"Don't feel sorry for yourself, Nii... I'll give you a treat."

Miru reached into her bag, pulled out a round, white object, and handed it to me. It was a marshmallow.

"Here's one for you," she said, handing another one to Kuroha.

Miru loved marshmallows. She always carried some around with her. She never kept them all to herself, and was always giving them to other people to eat. *She's such a kind girl.*

"We'll eat them on the train," I said.

It was a journey of twenty minutes from the closest station to our house to reach TOKYO. A long time ago, it would have taken the bullet train two hours, but in the current day, it only took a fraction of the time. Like the time it would take us all to eat marshmallows, we would be there in a jiffy.

Odaira-sensei had said he would meet us at the entrance to the history museum. The museum was in the center of a large park. It was a grand, historical building that was said to have been built more than 200 years ago, and many visitors were there.

So where might he be? I peered around, searching for him. *Oh, there he is.*

Odaira-sensei was wearing a brimmed hat and holding a walking stick. He looked like a proper English gentleman. Also, he was holding a white flag in his hand. He had said he would be holding some sort of sign.

Ah, I see now. That's easy to recognize.

On the flag was written: "Your Onii-chan is 此処 (koko/here)!"

Your Onii-chan is... something? It must have been a message meant for my sisters who could read kanji. It made me sad that he didn't take me into consideration.

"Maybe we could pretend that we don't know him," said Kuroha, sounding disgusted.

Why would we pretend we didn't know him? Is she feeling bashful all of a sudden?

"Sensei!" I yelled, waving my hand. He noticed, flung aside the flag, and headed toward us.

As I was about to greet him, he blew right past me as if I were not even there. He stopped behind me to stand in front of my sister Miru.

“Uwo...oooo...uwowooo...” He managed only a groan.

Miru stood there with her mouth half open in disbelief, looking up at him. “Who is this geezer?”

Miru, calling him a geezer is rude! I started to panic, but he didn’t seem to mind.

“Miru-chan, you’re right in the middle,” he said. “If you just had twin-tails, you’d be smack dab in the middle!”

“Kuroha, what is she in the middle of, do you think?” I asked in a whisper.

“...I’d rather not put it into words,” she replied, looking intently at Odaira-sensei. I wasn’t exactly sure what he was talking about, but knowing him, it must have been something literary.

“Miru-chan, let’s go inside!” he cried, trying to grab her hand.

“Shove it,” she said, slapping it away irritatedly.

What do you think you’re doing?! I started to panic even more and was about to apologize, but rather than getting angry, he seemed pleased.

“Miru-chan, what a delight you are! Like a surly little kitten!” Perhaps he was getting excited, as his face began to turn red.

“Say more mean things to me! I just love making icy little girls fall for me!” he proclaimed, his body quivering slightly, with his stomach stuck out. “N-Now, Miru-chan... call me ‘Onii-chan.’ And then I shall act coldly to you. Yes, I shall act coldly as I am called ‘Onii-chan’ by a little sister who says mean things to me... I can’t get enough of that!”

Miru looked up at him with a displeased expression. Perhaps she was suddenly curious, as she jabbed him in the stomach like pressing a button.

“Ah, ah, ahhh! Yes, yes this is it! ...I’m gonna overflow... It’s all gonna come out!” His eyes rolled to the back of his head, and his tongue was hanging out of his mouth.

That’s quite a face he’s making. It looked almost like steam was going to come out of his eyes and nose. *Did he mean water vapor was going to overflow?*

“Onii-chan, wait here for a second,” said Kuroha as she watched Odaira-sensei and Miru. With a frozen expression, she headed toward the security guard station. After a bit, she returned with a number of security guards, and they took Odaira-sensei away.

“Kuroha, Sensei was taken to the security station!

“Yeah. I didn’t anticipate he was at such a level...”

Such a level? I don’t know what you mean... Oh, I get it now! A person as famous as Odaira-sensei would cause a large commotion with all the people asking for his signature, so it must have been safer for him to stay in the security station. *I guess being famous isn’t such a great thing all the time.*

I had wanted to visit the museum with the professor-like Odaira-sensei, but considering the circumstances, it couldn’t be helped. We decided to go around on our own.

“Miru, I’m really sorry. This is because I told him we’d bring you to meet him... I bet you were scared.” Kuroha consoled her.

“Naw, he was a funny old coot. May he rest in peace.”

I’m pretty sure he’s not dying anytime soon!

We entered the museum. It seemed there was currently a “Heisei Exhibit” on display. Odaira-sensei’s latest work was set in the Heisei era, so perhaps there was a bit of a Heisei boom going on in the world.

We started going around the first floor. It started with a corner that showcased the people’s lifestyle in the Heisei era.

In the middle of the floor was a platform surrounded by glass, and inside was a full-sized recreation of a normal household room. On a plaque was written “PEEPS ROOM ♪.” In the middle of the room stood an approximately 20-year-old young man with glasses.

I guess he lives in this room? It seems like this figure had been recreated from the data of an actual person.

“Wow, wow!” said Miru, pressing her forehead up to the glass and taking it all in.

Indeed, it was impressive. He seemed completely real. They must have used the latest techniques in robotics engineering, as he didn't look like a mannequin at all. He looked like a flesh and blood human being.

The furnishings were also impeccably crafted and looked authentic. "Doesn't seem that different from today," said Kuroha, impressed.

It was true. The layout of the room and the clothes the young man was wearing seemed surprisingly not that old-fashioned.

"Nii, there's all kinds of stuff," said Miru, pointing to the center of the room.

There were many figures of girls, books with girls on the cover, and boxes with illustrations of girls on them. All the illustrations were of girls.

"What's that?" asked Miru, pointing to the wall. An illustration was hung there. How very like Miru to be interested in pictures. It was a full-body illustration of a girl. *There's a ring above her head, so it must be a drawing of an angel.* Around her body was wrapped what looked like the legs of an octopus. The tentacles seemed like they were squeezing tight, and the girl's expression was like she was in pain.

Jin●riru: The Devil Angel was written on it, and I could read the Ji●riru part, but the rest was written in kanji.

Tentacles squeezing an angel? There could be no mistaking it, this illustration was –

"A religious painting!" I gasped. It was a picture of an angel, so that was what it must have been. "The person who lived in this room was a very devout Christian, I see. Japan must have been deeply religious in this era."

"Oh..." nodded Miru in understanding.

"Is that really what it is?" asked Kuroha, doubtfully.

I'm pretty sure I'm right about this one!

"The figures on the shelves are clearly in the image of the Holy Mother Mary," I told her. There were dozens of figures lined up.

"Are you sure that Mary would be holding a guitar, or an axe, or wearing what I'm pretty sure is a school swimsuit?" asked Kuroha, with a chilly look.

“It’s from like, 200 years ago. That might look like a school swimsuit, but it’s something different. It could be the garb of a devout Christian.”

Kuroha stifled a laugh.

Hey, are you making fun of me?! I was about to give her a piece of my mind when Miru pulled on her skirt.

“Nee, look at that,” she said, pointing at the boxes strewn over the floor. The boxes had text as well as illustrations printed on them. *Thomas the* 痴漢者 *(chikan/molester)* was written on it, but all I could make out was “Thomas.”

“Nee, what does *chikan* mean?” Miru asked.

“W-What?!” yelped Kuroha in a high-pitched voice.

Chikan was an old-fashioned word. I had heard the term before, but I wasn’t sure what it meant.

“What is it?” Miru asked.

“Uh, well, it’s...”

“Tell me!”

“Ummmmmmm...” Kuroha seemed in a bind, but then her expression got serious and she proclaimed to Miru, “Watch closely!”

What is she getting at?

Kuroha moved closer to me and gestured twice as if she were rubbing my butt.

“Miru, do you understand? This is what a *chikan* is.” *Will she really understand the meaning like this? I don’t have a clue what she’s talking about...*

Miru looked back and forth between us, and said calmly “Nee, that’s called being a 痴女 (chijo/molestress).”

“How do you know what *chijo* means but not *chikan*?!” Kuroha shrieked.

“Mom and Dad taught me.”

“Mom and Dad aren’t that open about such things! ...Miru, you’re just teasing me, aren’t you?!” *What in the world does* chijo *mean? And what exactly did Mom and Dad teach her? Well I’d better play along...*

“Oh, I think I get it! Mom is a *chijo*, right? She’s young and pretty, so that’s really *chijo*-y, definitely. And she must have a lot of *chijo* friends, too! Miru, write in your elementary school yearbook that you want to be a *chijo* when you grow up!”

For some reason Kuroha was not pleased. She gave me a death glare.

Miru must have lost interest in learning what *chikan* meant, as she began looking around the room for something else interesting.

“Nee, what about that?”

“What is is now?” Kuroha asked.

There was an old-fashioned PC where Miru was looking. Something was being displayed on the monitor. There was an illustration of a girl in the middle of the screen, and there was text displayed below, written in both kanji and hiragana. Below that, written in English were the words “Log,” “Save,” and “Skip.” *Is this a screen from an old game, maybe?*

“Nee, can you also read the words?” Miru asked.

“Yeah,” said Kuroha, looking at the PC screen. It seemed like she was reading the text.

“What... is this?” said Kuroha, her face in disbelief.

What in the world does it say? I also tried to read the display... *Nope, can’t understand a thing.*

...You should lose your 童貞 (doutei/virginity) to me, your little sister...

“Nee, what does *doutei* mean?”

“Oh, not this again!” said a flustered Kuroha.

Doutei*... It rings a bell and yet it doesn’t ring a bell...* It must have been a word that had gone out of favor, like *chikan*.

“Tell me...” pried Miru, tilting her head to one side.

Kuroha seemed to waver...

Perhaps she doesn’t know what it means? If you don’t know, just say so already!

Kuroha pointed at me and said, “You’re one, Onii-chan!”

“Huh?” I replied, dumbfounded.

“Well, it’s true, isn’t it, Onii-chan?”

“I don’t really understand...”

“You’ve just got to be one, Onii-chan! I’d bet my entire allowance on it.”

“Well, if you put it that way...”

“If you say so, Nee, then I’ll believe you! You’re always watching him real close.”

“I see. Well, then I guess I must be a *doutei*,” I said.

“Understood.” Miru nodded in agreement.

What exactly does she understand?

“It means you’re kind and cool,” said Miru.

What a nice thing to say. And yet, I had a strange feeling something was off. “But, then why should I ‘lose’ it? Wouldn’t it be better to keep it?”

“You should really stop digging,” said Kuroha, shaking her head.

I knew it, she really didn’t know what it meant!

Miru seemed to have lost interest in the room recreation, and she started walking to another part of the exhibit. She was a very precocious child.

Kuroha looked at the PC screen again, rereading the text.

“Was this stuff really so common back then?”

“What do you mean by, ‘this stuff’?”

“Never mind,” Kuroha replied, averting her eyes, her face looking slightly flushed. She was staring intently at the young man’s figurines, as if to avoid looking at me. “Was the person who lived in this room really a typical person of that era?”

That’s what it says on the exhibit description, so it must be true.

We headed to the next floor. Important cultural artifacts were on display

inside glass cases.

“So cute!” exclaimed Miru with joy.

Inside the display case were hung what looked like pieces of fabric. Each one had a picture of a human figure on it. Most of them were of women facing forward, although there were a few men here and there.

What are these pieces of fabric? Let’s read the description...

“Ahh, they’re hugging-pillow covers!”

Hugging-pillow covers were a type of bedding which were produced heavily in the Heisei era. As the name implied, hugging-pillow covers were covers for long pillows with character illustrations on both sides. From what I knew, all normal people of that time had them.

“I do have to give the people of the past credit for their inventiveness. It was quite an idea,” said Kuroha.

“Yes, definitely,” I agreed.

“Are they no longer made?” she wondered.

“I’ve heard that there are still some artisans who practice the ancient craft in the old parts of town. Odaira-sensei special ordered some made of his little sisters. He says that he sleeps with a different one of them each night. Oh, and he wants to make one of Miru.”

Kuroha stood there, aghast.

“I want one of you, Nii!” said Miru, looking up at me. “I wanna sleep together with you, Nii.”

“In that case, you don’t need a pillow cover, because you have the real me! If you want to sleep together, that’s fine by –“

stomp

Suddenly I felt a sharp pain in my foot.

“Onii-chan!” Kuroha shouted. She had just stomped on my foot.

What's with you all of a sudden?!

As I was still reeling from the pain, Kuroha leaned in and put her lips to my ear. "Look, Miru just loves you as her real brother, got it? Don't be getting any ideas."

"Yeah, yeah... I know that," I said in puzzlement. Unlike Kuroha, Miru didn't know that I was adopted. She thought that I was her real, blood-related brother.

"And besides, in our family boys and girls sleep in different rooms starting in elementary school," Kuroha insisted.

"I get it already. Sheesh."

I used to sleep in the same room with Mom and Kuroha, but when I'd entered elementary school, I had gotten my own room. Back then, it was Kuroha who had seemed sad about it.

"I was just thinking that it wouldn't be so bad to sleep together with Miru once in a while, is all."

"Not even once in a while. What would you do if something happened?"

Something?

"Nii, Nee, please don't fight. Here, have some marshmallows," said Miru, calming us down. She opened up her bag and was searching around, probably to take out some marshmallows.

Kuroha, you totally overreacted. Eat some marshmallows and calm down.

After that, we went to look around the other floors of the exhibit. I thought it was very fulfilling to experience the culture of the Heisei era. After viewing many displays, we finally approached the last floor.

"Ooh..." I said, unable to stop myself.

In the middle of the floor, a gigantic portrait of a young woman was on display.

She had dazzling blonde hair and clear blue eyes. Unbelievably for an Oriental person, her white skin almost had tinges of pink. The black katyusha headband she was wearing on her head lent her an air of an antique Russian doll.

Homyura Taitei.

She was the heroine of the classic book *I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby.* She was probably the most famous 2D character in Japan.

This portrait was more realistic than the book's illustrations. *I guess you could call it* Homyura – Real Version.

"She's so pretty!" said Miru, drawn to the portrait.

"Yeah, she really is pretty," Kuroha agreed.

I took a good look. I had not told anyone, but my first love had been, in fact, Homyura. When I had read *Oniaka* in elementary school, my young heart had yearned for Homyura. That was when I had awakened to the joys of the opposite sex.

Now, though, I wouldn't go so far as to describe my feelings that way. Homyura was a 2D character. Unfortunately, nothing would come of falling in love with her. But that did not change the fact that she was a very special heroine to me. I was overjoyed to be able to view such a huge portrait of my special Homyura.

But...

"Isn't there something odd about this?" I craned my neck. "*Oniaka* was written quite a while after the Heisei era. It's a stretch to display a portrait of her in a Heisei exhibition."

"There's an explanation written here," said Kuroha. "Let's see..."

"Yes, indeed," said a sober voice from behind us. I turned around, and there was Odaira-sensei.

"Sensei! Are you sure it's safe?" I asked.

"Yes, I gave them the slip," he said proudly. "For my young friends, overcoming a few security guards is a small order."

Kuroha, with a defensive look on her face, pulled Miru away from him.

"Ah, yes... You wanted to know why this picture was here. It is said that Homyura was a real person."

I was surprised. I had thought that *Oniaka* was entirely a work of fiction.

“Oh, perhaps that is an inaccurate way of putting it. Homyura was not a real person, but rather there is a real person who served as her model. Lately, the theory that she was based on a person from the Heisei era has come into favor.”

This was all new to me. I had known that Homyura was based off someone. But I had always assumed the model had been a girl from the year 2060, when *Oniaka* had been published. I had never heard before that her model had been from the Heisei era.

“That is why I believe there is this large portrait of Homyura here in this Heisei exhibit,” finished Odaira-sensei, shrugging his shoulders.

After finishing with the museum, we headed back to Odaira-sensei’s house. We ate dinner, and afterward retired to the living room, sitting around the low table. Odaira-sensei brewed coffee and tea for us. It was an after-dinner teatime.

To go with the tea and snacks, Odaira-sensei brought out a plate of marshmallows he said he had received as a gift from an acquaintance. The marshmallows were squishy and chewy, and melted into sweetness in our mouths.

“These are delicious!” proclaimed Miru.

“You like marshmallows, right, Miru-chan?” he cooed. “Feel free to take them home with you. They’re special marshmallows that a friend of mine made.”

“Thanks, geezer!”

Odaira-sensei handed over a gift bag to Miru, and she placed it carefully in her pack. “Miru-chan, who has skin white like marshmallows, is eating marshmallows. It’s like cannibalism! So exciting!” he said.

“Your decrepitude knows no bounds,” sneered Kuroha, which almost made me break out in a cold sweat, but Odaira-sensei was so absorbed with Miru that he didn’t seem to notice one bit.

We ate our fill of marshmallows and relaxed. I looked through the window, and it was already completely dark outside. The clock showed that it was already 8 P.M. I was beginning to think that it was time to take our leave when Odaira-sensei asked me a new question.

“What did you think of the Heisei exhibit, Gin-kun?”

“It really left an impression on me,” I said. “I never knew that the people of that era were so religious.”

“Oh? Religious, you say?”

“Yes. Seeing all those holy figures and pictures in the recreation of that room was quite an eye-opener.”

“Ha ha ha!” laughed Odaira-sensei. “Holy, you call them? That’s an excellent way of putting it. They are very much a matter of devotion, that’s true,” he said, nodding in agreement.

See, I knew I was right about that!

“And what about you, Kuroha-kun?” he asked.

“Well, I had heard that in the Heisei era, there weren’t any wars, and the people’s minds were at ease. If I had been born into that era, maybe I would be a kinder person.”

“Oh, ho...” he said.

“I wish I could see it with my own eyes,” she continued.

“Yeah, that would be nice,” I agreed.

“You want to go see it too, Miru?” asked Kuroha.

“...fweh?” Perhaps Miru was tired, as she was lying with one cheek on the table, and looked like she was dozing off. It didn’t seem like she had heard Kuroha.

I’d better follow up for her.

“Your sister said that she wanted to go to the Heisei era and see it herself, after having seen the exhibition,” I explained.

Miru blinked a bunch. “Yeah... I wanna go and draw a lot...”

“Yes, yes.” Odaira-sensei narrowed his eyes behind his glasses. When he looked at Miru, his eyes could not have been more amorous. “Yes, I would love to have fun in that era.”

The Heisei era? It was said to be the era in which moe culture, the original influence of the Orthodox literary style, had begun to spread. *I bet the cities were overflowing with moe, and the people were all enjoying the moe lifestyle...*My mind was filled with thoughts of that ancient era. *Yes, today was a good day. I have a feeling I've charged up enough energy to write a new novel! Sensei, thank you so much!*

Miru looked like she was about to doze off, so I decided it was time for us to go.

"Kuroha, we can't stay too late..." I began.

Then it started.

Something strange.

The first person it happened to was Miru. *Pipi, pipi* – A sound like an alarm started coming from Miru's body. At first I thought her cellphone was broken, but that wasn't it.

Miru's body itself began to blink in and out. She looked at her own body in disbelief. The rest of us were also stunned into silence.

Next, Kuroha and Odaira-sensei also began to blink. The sound of an alarm made a chorus from their three bodies.

Finally, it was my turn.

"What's going on?" asked Kuroha, frightened.

Our flashing got faster and faster, and the *pipipipipipipi* sound of the alarm grew more and more rapid until it merged into one long tone.

What... what is this? What's happening to us?!

"Nii!" cried Miru, as if she had been driven into a corner.

There was a whooshing sound.

Before I had the chance to think, it was already too late. Miru had vanished.

"Miru!" cried Kuroha.

I could do nothing but stare soundlessly.

With another whooshing sound like a cutting wind, Odaira-sensei disappeared.

“Onii-chan...” Kuroha looked at me almost in tears.

“Kuroha!” I cried, reaching out to grab her hand, and she reached out in return. Just as our hands were about to touch, Kuroha disappeared.

I was left alone.

Where could the three of them have disappeared to? This isn’t some game of hide-and-seek, right?! Then I felt a sensation like someone pulling the hair on the back of my head. I lost consciousness and blacked out.

“...n.”

“...chan.”

“...Onii-chan!” Someone was shaking my body.

“Wake up, Onii-chan!” The voice belonged to Kuroha.

I groaned, opened my eyes, and sat up.

Kuroha was right in front of me. She was so close, I thought our lips might touch each other by accident.

“Kyah!” yelped Kuroha in a girly way. “B-Be careful!”

“Oh, sorry,” I mumbled.

“Nii!” Someone came running to give me a hug. She rammed into me at full speed. It was Miru.

“You’re awake, Nii!” Miru was burying her face in my stomach. Perhaps it was because of my unease, but I hugged her tight and didn’t want to let go.

“I’m sorry for worrying you.” I gently let her go and patted the top of her head.

“You wouldn’t wake up there for a while,” said Kuroha. “Do you think you’re all in one piece?”

I slowly moved away from Miru and checked myself for any injuries. I stretched my legs, flexed my shoulders, and rolled my neck around a bit. “Everything checks out okay. How about you two?”

It seemed like Kuroha and Miru were also fine. Knowing we were physically

okay was a small relief, even in such a tough situation.

“Wait, what happened to...” There was someone missing. “Where is Sensei?”

“He’s not here,” Kuroha said.

“Maybe he woke up before we did and headed off somewhere.”

Kuroha shook her head in response without saying anything.

Has he gone missing? Sensei, please be safe!

I was worried about him, but the first order of business was to figure out where we were. I looked around.

The first thing I noticed was the change in the time of day. Even though the sun had completely gone down after we had finished dinner, it was now high in the sky as if it were noon. We were also in a completely different place. I thought I smelled grass, and indeed we were laying on a wide lawn. This was definitely not Odaira-sensei’s house.

Maybe some kind of park?

Some tens of meters away from us was an old-looking Western-style house. Other than that, I couldn’t see any other buildings, just a line of trees surrounding the lawn.

“Where are we?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” replied Kuroha.

“Why don’t we check our cellphones to find out?” The GPS should have been able to tell us our location. I took out my cellphone from my pocket, but the display was completely blank. I thought that it might have gotten turned off, so I pressed the power button.

Hmm? This is odd. It’s not turning on.

“I guess yours doesn’t work either, Onii-chan,” Kuroha said.

“Which means...” I gathered that Kuroha’s phone was equally useless. “What about Miru’s cellphone?”

“Nope.”

Well, now we're in a pickle. We had no idea where we were, and no way of contacting Odaira-sensei. I was at a loss for what to do.

Isn't there something...? Ah, I know!

"Let's ask someone at that house if we can borrow their phone!" I pointed at the house I had seen.

It had a triangular roof, and there was a weather vane on the top. It looked like an ancient Western-style building. *Although it doesn't seem to be a normal house, it should at least have a phone.*

"That sounds like a better plan than just flailing about," agreed Kuroha.

We headed together to the entrance of the Western house. It was surrounded by a wooden fence, and there was a gate in front. We passed through the gate onto the grounds of the house.

This is a big mansion... It seemed even larger closer up. The door at the entrance opened with a creak, and a person came out from inside. A young woman.

Her blonde hair sparkled in the bright sunlight. She was wearing a black katyusha on her head. It looked like a blossom of darkness that contrasted wonderfully with her bright hair. When I looked down at her figure, she was wearing a white apron and holding a broom.

Maybe she's a house servant?

She looked at me.

–My heart stopped.

My heart didn't actually stop, of course. That was a figure of speech. But it is true that it might have really stopped for a few seconds. That was just how surprised I was.

Why? Because this girl resembled *her* just so perfectly.

"Homyura!" exclaimed Miru from behind me.

Homyura Taitei. The girl in the painting we had seen just hours earlier was standing before us.

The Homyura clone looked at us intently and smiled. It was such a kind smile, I was taken aback.

“Hello!” Her intonation was slightly unusual, but I could understand exactly what Ms. Clone said.

“Uh... hello,” I managed.

“Oh, my...” Her gaze went past me, she was looking at Miru’s hat. “What a cute hat! She must be Miru-chan, right?”

Color me shocked! How could she know Miru’s name?

“Yes, that’s right...” I said.

“Then you must be her friends,” she beamed.

I had no idea what she was talking about. *Whose friends were we supposed to be, exactly?*

Still bewildered, we all paid our thanks to Ms. Clone.

“Welcome, guests!” she said cheerfully.

We raised our heads up slowly, and were met with a shocking revelation.

“Welcome to the 21st Century!”

☆

My great and most honorable ancestor wrote under the name Torahiko Touji. From the Meiji era through the Taisho era, he left us many classic works of literature.

His work was well respected up until the Heisei era, but afterward, with the sudden rise of the Orthodox style of literature (oh, how I loathe the term with all of my being), he disappeared from the memories of readers. Records still barely exist of him, but his works are now considered mothballed old relics of no value.

I can barely contain my furor over the hideous way the world treats my great ancestor's writings, but some of the responsibility for failing to protect his good name lies with my own family.

In our house, we have kept preserved the diary of Torahiko's grandson, Takeono. In this diary is clearly documented our family distancing itself from literature during the Showa to the Heisei era.

"April 5th, Showa 58 (Wednesday) Rainy

It seems as if my son has been creating an independent magazine: a *doujinshi.* In my student years, I also was in charge of the literary magazine, so I thought I would be proud of my son for finally awakening to literature, but something is not right here.

When I asked him to show me what he was writing, he pulled out a thin book. It was indie, that is true, but the content was a fanwork based off an animated character. With an illustration of a pink-haired girl on the cover, he told me her name was Momo or Ume or something like that.

It seems like he will be selling this book at an exhibition center at the Harumi area in Tokyo. There will be some sort of *doujinshi* sales event there.

It is a world that I do not understand, and it confuses me completely.

Although it pains me to say it, it does not look like my son will become a literary person like Grandfather Torahiko."

"March 5th, Heisei 21 (Saturday) Sunny

My grandson has been awarded the Newcomer's Prize, and has become an author. It is a thing to celebrate, but when I asked him whether his work tended toward the Akutagawa Prize or the Naoki Prize, he replied coarsely, "It's not like those at all." Upon further prying, it seems like he is writing something called "light novels" which are targeted toward younger readers.

My grandson wanted to become a manga artist, but he was not talented at drawing, and settled for being an author, it seems. Even after becoming an author, he still hasn't gotten over it, and I think he shows off his art on some site called pixy or pixer or something.

I was angry, yes, for the low amount of mind he paid the literary field, but seeing him enjoying himself was enough, in the end, to satisfy me. Nothing is more important than the happiness of your family, after all."

Ahh... The resignation had already begun to sink in.

Even with such a great ancestor as Torahiko Touji, his sons were swept away by the changing times.

What a pity. How he must be full of regrets and gnashing his teeth.

Rather than fight it, our family welcomed the long winter. Not a one awakened to proper literature, and we all became cut off from our ancestor's work.

But then, I was born. I shall not cater myself to this era. I will fight with all my being to bring back the literature of my ancestors. Witness me from the afterlife, so that you may rest in peace.

Chapter 3 - Expectations and Reality

“Welcome to the 21st century!”

Those were the words Ms. Clone had spoken.

I thought about what they might mean. *Well, they mean what they mean, right?*

“What in the world is this?” The question was asked not by me, but by my sister Kuroha. She moved in front of me, almost pushing me aside.

“This? Let me introduce myself. My name is Yuzu Mirokuin,” said Ms. Clone, seeming to misunderstand Kuroha’s question. *So Yuzu is her first name, and Mirokuin is her family name? I’ll be polite, but friendly, and call her Yuzu-san.*

“That’s not what I was asking. You just said, ‘Welcome to the 21st century!’ but the year is 2202. It should be the 23rd century,” replied Kuroha.

“Oh, is that what you meant? Um... You have all travelled through time, I think.”

Travelled through time?

“Here, look at this,” she continued, taking a boxy cellphone out of her apron. It looked like it had a very old-fashioned design. She turned the screen so we could see it.

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“This is today’s date.”

“That explains it.” I nodded. It seemed like we had travelled back in time.

“Onii-chan! You’re just going to believe it so easily?!” exclaimed Kuroha, approaching me with an exasperated expression.

Why shouldn’t I believe it? “That’s what the date says, right?”

“Come on, you can easily change the date on a phone!” Kuroha cried.

“Oh, you can?” Yuzu-san asked with a surprised look on her face. She stared

intently at the phone, and happily announced, “You learn something new every day!”

“Besides, how does she know that we travelled through time? Isn’t this the first time we’ve met?” Kuroha asked me, but Yuzu-san was the one who responded.

“The person who came here earlier told me about you.”

“The person who came earlier? Who was that?” asked Kuroha.

“Odaira-san.”

Odaira?! I ran up to Yuzu-san. “You know where Sensei is?” I asked, raising my voice despite myself.

“Sensei...? For someone that young to be called ‘Sensei,’ they must be really impressive.”

Someone that young? She must have meant someone so “young at heart.” Sensei’s sensibilities were always so young and fresh, after all.

“Odaira-san said there were three others, and showed me pictures,” continued Yuzu-san.

Odaira-sensei must have shown Yuzu-san photographs of us. ...But I didn’t recall ever giving him any pictures.

“Pictures of us?” I repeated.

“No, just pictures of Miru-chan,” replied Yuzu-san. “Odaira-san said ‘This is my special friend Miru-chan’ and showed me a bunch of pictures really happily.”

“...Were those pictures taken with her facing the camera?” asked Kuroha, emitting a dangerous aura.

“Now that you mention it... she wasn’t looking at the camera in any of them.”

“When did he...?!” cried Kuroha, the veins popping out on her temples.

“Where did Sensei go?” I asked, and Yuzu-san turned to look at the house.

Just then, the front door opened, and a blonde-haired little girl appeared from inside. She looked to be about ten years old. *She must be the same age as Miru.*

She was cute and puffed out her cheeks. Her hair was tied up with two ribbons, and hung down on either sides of her face. In other words, she had twin-tails. She was wearing a frilly black one-piece dress that looked more like a costume out of an anime.

“Ah, Onii-sama...” said the girl when she saw me, in a pretty voice, her eyes looking up at me mistily.

Onii-sama? I was pretty sure I had never met her before.

“Onii-sama, you came for me, didn’t you?” she continued.

Huh? Huh? I was confused.

“As long you have me, you don’t need any other little sisters,” the girl began, but Miru cut her off.

“Who the hell are you?” Miru demanded, as if speaking to an enemy. The cat ears on her beret usually flopped down, but they were now standing up rigid and tall. It was like she was trying to intimidate the other girl.

The little girl turned to look at Miru. And as she did, her eyes turned to a loving gaze...

“Ahahaha, I was just making a joke, Miru-chan,” said the girl, putting her hands on her hips and puffing out her chest. “It’s me!” she announced.

Her attitude rang a bell in my head... *Wait, could that be...* But such a thing was ridiculous to even consider.

“Are you Odaira-sensei?” asked Kuroha, saying what I didn’t dare to.

The girl spun around, closed her eyes, and said, “Bingo!”

“I’ve become a blonde, twin-tailed, beautiful little girl!”

“Ehhhhhhhhhhh–?!” This was a level beyond shocking. It was astonishing beyond belief.

A 70-year-old gentleman had been transformed into an adorable little girl! *His instincts for his profession are at a whole other level!* In order to write the most realistic young girls, Odaira-sensei had overcome even the boundaries of age and gender. *Sensei, you are truly impressive!*

“Geezer, how’d you pull this trick?” asked Miru.

“When I came to, this is how I was, Miru-chan. I bet you have even more appreciation for me now, yes?”

“No, you’re creepy.”

“Miru-chan, I hope you never change!”

Hearing the two of them go back and forth made it all the more clear it was him. I went to get closer, but Kuroha interrupted me.

“Wait. Let me test whether it really is Odaira-sensei,” she said, putting out her arm to block me.

“He had pictures of Miru-chan, so it must be him,” I said.

“We shouldn’t be so sure with just that. Maybe she’s some kind of kidnapper. Onii-chan, ask her some question that only Odaira-sensei would be able to answer,” asked Kuroha, seeming very defensive.

I reluctantly decided to ask a question so the girl could prove she was actually Odaira-sensei.

“Sensei, sorry about this. Can I ask you a question?”

“Sure, no problem.”

“What is the name of the heroine in *LILSIS* ☆ *STAR*?”

“Rin,” answered the girl immediately.

See, I knew it was him! I was glad to be proven right, but Kuroha didn’t seem like she was convinced.

“Onii-chan, is there something wrong with you? That book is a bestseller! There are tons of people who know the name of the main heroine!”

“Oh, now that you mention it...” I started to think of a better question. Questions about his books were not going to work. They were all too widely read. Questions from interviews he had given were also something I should avoid. I needed to ask something that only I knew about Odaira-sensei... *Let me see...*

“What are Miru’s birthday and blood type?”

“April 9th, 2192, and AB.”

“What are her height and measurements?”

“She is 135 centimeters tall. You said that you didn’t know her measurements, so you couldn’t tell me. Even though I begged you for them, jerk.”

“The last time Miru wet the bed, what did she say to me when she came to my room?”

The girl bent her knees and rubbed her thighs against each other fidgeting, acting it out. “‘Nii, wake up. Come to my room.’”

All correct. There was no more doubt. *It’s you, Sensei!*

I bounded up to Odaira-sensei, embracing him in my arms. He was squeezable and soft. “I’m so moved. You turned into a little girl all so that you could write little girl characters all that more realistically!”

“Fuwahaha. If you live a pure and righteous life, your wishes really do come true, it seems!” Odaira-sensei smiled and laughed.

How adorable! He spoke like Odaira-sensei, but his voice and body were that of a young girl. I doubted that anyone would be able to realize that he was actually a 70-year-old man on the inside.

“Hold it, Onii-chan,” an oddly furious voice came from behind as I emotionally reunited with Odaira-sensei. You can probably guess who the voice had come from. “Sorry to interrupt your tearful reunion there.”

“Uh... Well...”

“You seemed to have given out quite a bit of Miru’s personal information.”

“...Should I not have done that?”

“Miru must be pretty upset,” said Kuroha, calmly. “Aren’t you, Miru?”

“I am a little vexed,” said Miru.

Oh crap, I made Miru angry. Better apologize.

“Miru, I’m sorry! I wasn’t being fair, was I?”

“Fair?”

“Yeah. I told Sensei about you, so it’s only fair that I tell you stuff about Sensei. It was really silly of me not to realize. Sensei’s measurements are...”

“Who would want to know that?!” Kuroha interjected.

Scary! There were plenty of passionate fans who would be interested, I thought.

“Um, maybe we could all talk inside?” Yuzu-san must have noticed the fear in my voice, as she kindly diffused the situation.

Phew, thanks. Maybe she was the reincarnation of a goddess.

We entered the house, and were led into the den. We sat down on the sofa in the room, and I looked around. The room was filled with antique Western furniture, and there was a grandfather clock that caught my eye.

“I’ll make some tea for everyone,” said Yuzu-san as she left the room.

Kuroha stared at her as she left.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I’m still not sure why she is treating us this nicely.”

“Isn’t it because we are time travelers in trouble?”

“That’s just it. Is this really 201X? I still don’t believe it,” replied Kuroha.

“Kuroha-kun, this is without a doubt the Heisei era. For I saw with my own eyes a holy relic from the ancient past,” said Odaira-sensei.

A relic?

Odaira-sensei grinned, and told us the story of what had happened when he woke up.

He told us that he had woken up on the grounds of a nearby elementary school, and found himself in the body of a little girl for some reason. Just as he had decided to inspect the surroundings of the elementary school, Yuzu-san had walked by. After he had spoken with her, they had found a kindred spirit in each another, and she had taken him back to her house. It seems they had bonded over their blonde hair.

“So then, what was this relic you mentioned?” I asked, curious.

“Right before I met Yuzu-kun, I saw a *randoseru* when I looked into the elementary school.”

“*Randoseru*? What is that?”

“The *randoseru* is an ancient style of book bag for elementary school students. It was created by the military, so they were extremely rugged. The image of young, tender-aged girls wearing them on their backs was the pinnacle of fetishism.” As Odaira-sensei finished his explanation, he turned his eyes passionately toward Miru, who was fiddling with her hat’s cat ears and looking bored. “When I imagine you wearing that big, rugged *randoseru* on your back, Miru-chan, I... Oh, I’m already...” He started to breathe heavily.

Kuroha shot him a dagger-like glare. “So you think we’re in the Heisei era just because you saw a *randoseru*?”

“There are also the calendars in this house, and the date they said on the TV news report... They all say that it’s the year 201X,” he replied.

“But that’s still just...”

“Kuroha, doubting everything isn’t going to get us anywhere,” I said, cutting her off. “This is the 21st century. Just accept that for now.”

“...Fine.” She didn’t seem completely convinced, but she nodded reluctantly.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.” Yuzu-san called out from the entrance to the den, bringing tea with her. The aroma of freshly brewed herb tea wafted over us.

Yuzu-san had taken off her apron, revealing a deep red jersey underneath. She looked exactly like Homyura from the neck up, but her fashion sense was completely different.

Yuzu-san began to place teacups on the table. When I looked at her from the side, she noticed and looked back, giving me a smile.

After setting out the teacups, she plopped down on the sofa with us. “I don’t think I’ve learned everyone’s names yet. If you don’t mind, could everyone please introduce themselves?” she asked.

Now that she mentions it, yeah... How rude of us.

“I’m Gin Imose. And these are my sisters, Kuroha and Miru.” I introduced us all to her once again.

“My, what unique names you all have! What kanji do you use to write them?”

“Kanji?” I asked.

“My name is written with the tree radical 木 combined with 由. It’s written like this: 柚.”

I was very confused. I didn’t understand what Yuzu-san was saying.

“All our names are spelled using katakana,” replied Miru quietly, since I couldn’t answer.

“You all write your names using katakana?” asked Yuzu-san.

“In our time, no one uses kanji anymore,” replied Kuroha.

Yuzu-san let out an “Eh?” Her eyes grew wide.

“People’s names and places are now all commonly spelled using katakana,” Kuroha explained. “All that’s left is the *ruby*.”

In the later half of the 21st century, all kanji had started to have their readings written above them using katakana. These readings were called *ruby*. As the years passed, eventually only the *ruby* remained. That was why people’s names and places were now all written in katakana.

“So then none of you can read kanji, I see. If you have any problems, please just ask.”

“It’s fine. I can read them,” said Kuroha, writing something in the air with her finger. It seemed like it was a kanji. “‘Yuzu’ is written like 柚, right?”

“Yes, that’s it!” exclaimed Yuzu-san, nodding happily.

“Odaira-sensei, Miru, and I can all read kanji,” said Kuroha. Yuzu-san beamed at each person in turn.

Kuroha, Miru, Sensei –

Her gaze stopped at my face.

“Um, and what about you, Gin-san?”

“Kanji is way outta Nii’s league!” said Miru.

“Oh, my.” Yuzu-san stared at me intensely. I was embarrassed in any number of ways. “Gin-san, you’re cute.”

“Huh?”

“You’re the older brother, but you can’t read kanji. That’s cute.”

“O-Okay...” It was the first time in my life that a girl had called me “cute.” I was oddly embarrassed. I averted my eyes from Yuzu-san. But when I did, Kuroha’s glum face came into view. Her mouth was making an odd shape. Compared with Yuzu-san’s caring smile, it was like night and day.

“So lame,” whispered Kuroha to herself. She said it softly, but I felt like she really said it with a strange conviction.

Why do you have to make people so uncomfortable? You should learn a thing or two from Yuzu-san.

A big smile came over Yuzu-san’s face. “Ah, yes! Everyone will be hanging out here for a while, right?”

Did she mean, like, in this time period? We weren’t hanging out, exactly. We just had no way to go back.

“You probably didn’t make reservations at a hotel, did you?” she continued.

“Not like we had any way to...” Kuroha sighed.

“In that case, please stay here in my home!”

Boy, am I happy to hear that! I was about to thank her for the offer, when...

“We couldn’t impose on you like that,” said Kuroha, shaking her head *no.* The words were just being polite, but her expression was quite serious. “Why are you going so far out of your way for us?” she continued.

“Wouldn’t you want to have guests that came from the future? It’s amazing! I feel so blessed!”

“*That’s* your reason?”

“Do you find it odd?” Yuzu-san replied, genuinely curious.

“It’s not that it’s odd, it’s just...” Kuroha didn’t seem to be able to find it in herself to trust Yuzu-san.

“Nee, I wanna stay here...” Miru said, tugging on Kuroha’s blouse.

“Kuroha-kun, you do realize that we aren’t carrying any money from this period, yes? Are you going to tell Miru-chan she has to sleep outside?” Odaira-sensei chided.

“That’s not what...” Kuroha trailed off.

“Well, I’m fine with camping out. Nothing but me, a defenseless Miru-chan, and the open fields. With this body, I’ll make those fields blossom with fresh blue lilies... How fun!”

“Blue lilies? You mean you and Miru-chan will appreciate the flowers? Just imagining it makes my worries go away,” I said.

“Gin-kun, it seems you don’t understand my meaning.”

“No, I understand. ‘Blue’ is a symbol of youth, and also means ‘under the blue sky.’ It’s a double meaning.”

“Well you aren’t wrong about that, but you’re missing the main part,” he replied.

“The main part? Kuroha, do you know what he’s talking about?”

“Honestly, how did we even get on to this conversation?! Fine, whatever! We’ll be happy to stay here! I have to protect Miru...” responded Kuroha in exasperation.

What? Did she know what Sensei was talking about or not? I’m not following.

“Yes, then it’s settled. We will be staying here,” concluded Odaira-sensei.

Yuzu-san was just watching us talk back and forth with a kind little smile.

And with that, we were allowed to stay in this giant house. Yuzu-san told us we could borrow three rooms that apparently weren’t being used.

After consulting with us, we split up the rooms into one for myself, one for Odaira-sensei, and one for Kuroha and Miru. Odaira-sensei had proposed that the two “youngest” share a room together, but Kuroha shut down that idea

immediately.

My room was on the second floor. And for the record, all the girls' rooms (including Odaira-sensei's) were on the first floor.

"You're the only one on the second floor, Gin-san. I'll show you the room," said Yuzu-san.

"Thank you very much." I followed Yuzu-san up the stairs, and my vision filled with the sight of her back and legs...

Wow... Her butt is so cute, and she has such ample thighs.... The lines of her body were extremely feminine. I was looking at her from behind so I couldn't be sure, but I suspected that her breasts were of considerable size, as well. My male instincts took over and I started to become excited.

Yuzu-san had so much style to her. Her blonde hair looked all-natural, so perhaps she was not 100% Japanese. *I wonder...*

"Um, Yuzu-san..."

Right as we came to the top of the stairs, Yuzu-san turned around and replied, "Yes?"

"Are you only half Japanese?"

"Yes! Probably," she answered.

Probably?

"As you can likely tell, I'm not fully Japanese. But I don't know what other kind of blood runs in me." She said that with a smile on her face, but somehow, I noticed a hint of loneliness.

I guess she must have her own issues. I did not pry further.

The room she led me to was three times the size of my room at home. It had a bay window, and there was a thick, dark green carpet laid out. It was like a room that European nobles would live in.

"What a wonderful room. I'm really grateful, but... are you sure it's okay?"

"It's fine. I'm really glad that the place will become so lively."

"But... What if your parents are against it?"

“Oh, didn’t I say something about that? My parents are overseas and won’t be coming back for a little while.”

This was the first I had heard about it. It seemed like Yuzu-san was living alone in this house at the moment. Her parents were living overseas for their work, and would not return for a number of years.

It was a very large mansion, so one would think there would be some staff like a butler or a maid, but from the looks of it, they didn’t employ a single person for help.

“With such a big house, I bet cleaning it all is hard. I’ll help out,” I offered.

“Thank you! But I actually really enjoy cleaning. I’ll make sure to clean your room, too, so don’t worry about a thing, Gin-san,” she said, smiling calmly. It was a smile that told me gently, *I’m happy to be of service to you.* Her maturity made me feel like a little child. *I wonder if this is what it is like to have an older sister?*

The thought reminded me that I didn’t know how old Yuzu-san was, or what she did every day. She looked a little bit older than me, but she was still young enough to be in school, I figured.

“Are you a student, Yuzu-san?”

“Yes, I am. Here, look at this,” she said, pointing at the breast of the jersey she was wearing. 白明学園 was embroidered there, but I couldn’t read the kanji.

“Ah, I’m sorry! This is the jersey of the high school I go to.”

I see, so she’s a high school student.

“I’m also in high school,” I replied.

“What year?”

“Second year.”

“Then you’re like my older brother.”

Was Yuzu-san a first-year, then? However in this era, perhaps the years of high school were different. I clarified, “I’ll be 17 this year. How old are you?”

“I’m 16. That makes you one year older than me.”

Whoops, she's younger than me! Just goes to show you how mature she acts. All of my classmates and upperclassmen seemed like little kids compared to her. *I guess Kuroha is similar, though. They're both beautiful and seem a lot older than they really are.*

Yuzu-san must have looked at my reaction as she puffed up her cheeks in a pout. "You just thought to yourself, 'She looks older than her age,' didn't you?"

"That's not it! I just thought you were really mature, is all..." But that didn't seem to placate her. "I mean, beautiful people look younger as they get older, right?"

...Shoot. I might have just put my foot in my mouth. When I had said the same thing to Kuroha, she had gotten really mad. Was it really such a rude thing to say to a girl? But Yuzu-san's reaction was different than Kuroha's.

"B-Beautiful...?" She had trouble saying the word. It seemed like she was embarrassed by it. "Gin-san, you probably say that to everyone, right?"

"Oh, not at all. Honestly, I thought you would be used to being called beautiful, Yuzu-san."

"Other than my older brother, no one has ever called me that before," she admitted.

Really? But she's so pretty... Maybe everyone other than her brother just had no eye for beauty.

Wait... "Yuzu-san, you have an older brother?"

"Ah..." she sighed softly, looking down, her shoulders slumping. "I had an older brother. Until three months ago."

The air in the room suddenly felt heavy. *Oh no, what have I done?* Maybe her brother had had to move away, or in the worst case, maybe he had passed away... In any case, it was clearly something she was very sad about.

Yuzu-san didn't say anything for a few seconds, and then suddenly announced, "Um, I'm going to tend to the yard. Please make yourself at home!" She spun around and headed out to the hallway. Her steps echoed from the stairway on her way down.

I seems like the subject of her brother was taboo. *I'd better be careful about that from now on.*

I went over to the bay window and opened it up. Fresh air drifted into the room. The greenery I saw outside was peaceful and pastoral, and yet, this was supposed to still be in TOKYO. Yuzu-san had said we were in OKUTAMA.

In our era, the urban concentration had progressed, and in the places where people lived, the population density was very high. It had been generations since people's houses had been surrounded by such nature. This scenery really made me feel like I had traveled through time.

I thought about this situation. *Why did we come to this time period, I wonder?* It was difficult to imagine that it was just some supernatural phenomenon. There had to be something that had triggered the event. I had to figure out what caused it. If I wanted to become an author, I had to return to the 23rd century.

I let the fresh air waft over me for a bit, and then shut the window. I went over to the bed and lay down on it. It was soft and comfortable. I felt like I could relax.

It was all thanks to Yuzu-san that I could rest worry-free in this era. I was truly grateful that she was the first person we had met in this time period. She was so kind to us.

She was the spitting image of Homyura from *Oniaka*, so being treated so kindly by her made my heart skip a beat. When I thought about Yuzu-san, I let out a sigh like "Uwah..."

A lot had happened today, and now that I felt safe, I suddenly felt extremely tired. Sleep overtook me as visions of Yuzu-san floated up behind my closed eyes...

One week had passed since we had come to the 21st century. In that week, we had relied completely on Yuzu-san. She prepared all our meals, and she handled all the small details.

But Yuzu-san was not a person with a lot of free time at all. She would go to school on weekdays from morning until evening, and she would deal with us in between. She was shouldering a lot of responsibility.

This was really imposing too much, so we convinced Yuzu-san to let us help as

much as we could with the housework. This was primarily cleaning the mansion and tending to the garden. We were prepared to work hard, but with the four of us splitting up the duties, cleaning was over in no time.

During the day we had nothing else to do, so we each did what we liked.

Odaira-sensei was writing a new novel. Even travelling through time could not stop him from practicing his profession. He was writing using his usual current-day Japanese, but on the occasion when he couldn't think of any ideas, he would sometimes write in the old-fashioned modern Japanese to clear his mind.

Miru was sketching the scenery. She had been absorbed in that for two or three days, but after a week, it seemed like she'd gotten bored. She was always changing her interests like that.

If you had to ask what Kuroha and I were doing, well... we watched TV, basically.

The first time we turned on the TV, we were shocked at what we saw. Right off the bat there were a ton of actual, real people! They were all something called "TV personalities," we gathered.

In this era, the amount of anime on TV was completely dwarfed by the number of these programs where these TV personalities would perform.

Can they actually get ratings using real people?

In our time period, news and variety programs would all feature 2D characters, so it was a new experience for us.

One thing to be thankful about was that we could pretty much understand what these TV personalities were talking about. The writing style was different, but the spoken language used in this era was not so different from ours. According to Kuroha, spoken Japanese had not changed much since the Meiji era.

Unfortunately, as I could not read kanji, I wasn't able to learn the names of these TV personalities when they were shown on the screen. The only ones I could read were "Eno●nta," "E●rikazuki," and "Tsuno●☆hiro." I liked the last person because he used symbols in his name, like Odaira-sensei's books.

Some things were interesting since we knew about the future. For example, about books. According to the news on TV, the number of ebooks was beginning to grow rapidly, and it was only a matter of time until printed books became relics of history.

This was totally off. In the 23rd century, printed books were still what everyone used. According to what Odaira-sensei told me, there had been a time when ebooks had taken over, but that in turn had caused paper prices to plummet, and printed books had made a comeback afterward.

Just watching TV every day was really fun. I enjoyed watching the dramas and variety programs, but I enjoyed watching the anime the most, by far. An incredible number of episodes were stored on the digital recorder and on optical discs.

It was the first time I had watched Heisei era anime, but there were many shows which were very literary and to my taste. It was like my Orthodox style literature had been made into TV programs: A boy entering an all-girls' academy, or an alien girl suddenly making herself at home in a boy's house, etc...

Also, in the anime, I saw something that surprised me. When a girl would get naked, her dangerous bits would be covered by beams of light or steam.

Light beams shining in the dark! Steam billowing from absolutely nowhere! How incredibly ridiculous it all was. Truly this was the origin of the Orthodox style!

I was so happy with it all, I couldn't keep still. When people are glad, they naturally want to keep active. When there was a scene with a panty flash, I clapped, and when there was a nude scene, I clasped my hands together in prayer. For some reason, Kuroha would stare at me coldly.

One Sunday, I called out to Yuzu-san in the hallway. I wanted to thank her for showing me all the anime. She was wearing her katyusha on her head and had on a jersey. When she was in the house, this was how she always dressed. She must have really been fond of it.

"Thank you so much for the anime," I told her.

"You enjoyed it?"

“Yes. There were some excellent panty flashes,” I replied.

“Well, I’m glad about that,” she said, smiling broadly.

She’s so cute... Whenever I looked at Yuzu-san’s smile, I felt like my heart would beat itself out of my chest.

“Actually, what do mean by ‘excellent panty flashes’?” she added.

Hoho... I bet she wants me to go on in detail about which series and which scene. I began to describe them to her in as much detail as I could.

“Uh... Um...” Yuzu-san seemed hesitant for some reason, as if my description wasn’t very good. “I’m sorry, but I haven’t watched any of those.”

“You haven’t?”

“It is my brother’s anime collection.”

Aha, so that’s why!

“Then you don’t usually watch anime?”

“Right. Actually, I’ve hardly seen any at all,” Yuzu-san explained.

You don’t watch anime?! Such a statement would be unbelievable, were it not the 21st century. Common sense in this era must have been completely different.

“Actually, about that, there is something I need some help with,” continued Yuzu-san.

“What is it?”

“I need to buy a piece of merchandise from an anime called *Magical Girl Super Sadie*.”

“*Magical Girl Super Sadie*? Do you mean *that* Sadie?” I replied, but she gave me back a blank stare.

A magical girl statue had been excavated in the 23rd century which was worth 50 billion yen. My memory was hazy, but I was pretty sure it had come from a show called *Sadie*.

“I’m sorry, I don’t really know very much about anime...” she said.

“I’m the one who should apologize. It seems like something important, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is something very important,” said Yuzu-san. “But I don’t have any idea how to buy something like that.”

“What about using the internet?”

“My brother used it all the time, but since I didn’t understand it, I canceled the contract.”

“What about your local shops?”

“I asked the people at the supermarket where I buy groceries if they had the item that I had written down, but they broke out in laughter. They told me they didn’t sell things like that.”

What did she write down, I wonder?

“...I wonder where I could buy it?” she continued.

“In the capital, Yuzu-kun.” The voice entered suddenly from the side. Turning my head, I saw Odaira-sensei standing there.

“In the capital? Aren’t we technically in Tokyo, though?” Yuzu-san didn’t seem to understand.

“Hahaha, it’s true that TOKYO is the capital of Japan. That hasn’t changed since your era. What I am talking about is the capital of something a little smaller, a little more cultural...”

I could almost see the question mark floating above Yuzu-san’s head.

I knew what Odaira-sensei was referring to when he said the “capital of culture.”

“Sensei, I think you are being a little unfair to Yuzu-san, using that kind of language,” I said knowingly. I was sure where Odaira-sensei was saying we should go, so I said the name aloud. “Akihabara.”

Yuzu-san looked at Odaira-sensei as she finally understood. He grabbed his twin-tails in his hands, and while pulling on them, he said, “Correct!”

That afternoon, the five of us headed to AKIHABARA. It would be the first time

we had gone out of the house since coming to this time period.

We got on the train at OKUTAMA Station, and from there I gathered it would take more than two hours to get to AKIHABARA. Because the Heisei era trains were so slow, we had time to take in the scenery.

“Wow, look at that! Roof tiles!” I was impressed.

“It looks like there are still buildings left that were made of wood,” Kuroha added.

“Nii, there are lots of signs with kanji on them!” Miru said, excitedly.

Our eyes were all glued to the scenery passing by the train windows. As we got closer to the city center, more modern high-rise buildings began to come into view. The city buildings being slowly replaced by new structures was very Heisei-like. *Viva la 21st century!*

On the way there, we switched trains a number of times, and finally reached AKIHABARA. We passed through the “Akihabara Electric Town Exit” gates and took a look around.

Wait, this isn’t nearly as moe as I had imagined it. I figured it would be filled with pretty 2D girls, but I only saw a few billboards here and there. *That’s it? Seriously?* I felt cheated.

The thing that did impress me was how crowded it was. A huge number of people were coming and going, and I felt like if I wasn’t careful, I would bump into someone. The population of Japan had been over 120 million in this era, so it was no wonder that TOKYO was overflowing with people.

It was chaos the moment we exited the station. My eyes and ears were accosted by the amalgamation of electronic sounds coming from all around, by the people trying to call us into shops, by the colorful, bright lights of kanji-filled signs, and by the noise of the crowd. There was a spark to the city that wasn’t present in the tidy streets of the 23rd century, and it bowled me over.

If I were to write a novel set in this district, how would I ever describe it?

“So this is Akihabara... It’s my first time here,” said Yuzu-san happily. Yuzu-san had changed out of her jersey and was wearing her school uniform. She wore her

school sweater over a white blouse on top with a pleated skirt below. It seemed like she always wore her school uniform when going out, and when I asked her, “Don’t you have any other clothes you like to wear outside of school?” she replied energetically, “Nope!”

“Hmm...” Odaira-sensei was scanning around with his eyes. He must have been checking out each area of AKIHABARA carefully. “There are a lot of people, but hardly any little girls.”

“You’re enough of a little girl for this town, Sensei. Let’s start looking for this thing Yuzu-san wants to buy,” replied Kuroha.

Now, what was this item Yuzu-san was looking for? A *Magical Girl Super Sadie* Limited Edition Booby Mousepad. Neither myself nor Kuroha had any idea what a “Booby Mousepad” was, or had even heard the term.

When we asked Yuzu-san, she replied, “Hmm, I wonder what a ‘mousepad’ is?” unhelpfully.

It seems like Yuzu-san had written it down on a note as something she had to buy. Why she needed to get it was still a mystery, though.

Our last hope was Odaira-sensei, who was knowledgable about the culture and ways of the Heisei era. Fortunately, he knew what a “booby mousepad” was. He said that it was a mousepad with an illustration of the top half of a female character where the breast part was shaped like the character.

I knew we could count on you, Sensei!

With that, I figured it should be no problem to buy one, but Odaira-sensei didn’t know what kind of store would sell them.

“They are famous Heisei era works of art, after all...”

“Well if you don’t know, ask someone!” recommended Kuroha confidently.

Yup, well said.

The only issue was who to ask... In times like these, standard practice was to rely on the wisdom of elders.

As if on cue, an old lady came walking past. *I'm gonna ask her!*

"Pardon me. Do you happen to know where they sell *Sadie* booby mousepads?"

The old lady let out a "Huh?" and turned to look at me. "Booby?" she asked, surprised.

Is it so strange to ask about fine artwork? I became a little unsure of myself, but the look on the old lady's face quickly softened and she began to smile peacefully.

"I'm sorry. I don't much know about the things young people are into these days. I just change trains here is all." She continued to explain that she would be getting on the SOBU LINE on her way to TSUDANUMA in CHIBA. I was unfamiliar with the place names.

"If you want to buy something, I'd say use Japan Shopping Network."

"Japan Shopping Network?"

"You know, the TV shopping channel?"

"There. Perfect," nodded Odaira-sensei. "It has the name of the country in its name, so clearly it must be a channel that sells reputable goods. I would not be surprised if it sold booby mousepads."

"Where can we watch this channel?" I asked.

"Maybe in one of those electronics stores? Like that one, over there," replied the old lady, pointing to a far off building. When I looked at the building, I saw a sign that said "石丸電気 (Ishimarudenki), and although I couldn't read the kanji, I was sure it had to be an electronics store.

"Thank you very much!" We all thanked the old woman, and headed to the electronics store.

I was so fed up, I wanted to yell, "Goddamn it!"

We had left the electronics store and were now wandering the streets of AKIHABARA. There were TVs in the electronics store. Plenty of them. Every one seemed like an antique, but they all worked properly. And yet, the Japan Shopping Network never came on, even though we waited patiently. For two and a half hours!

“Did she trick us?” Odaira-sensei stamped his feet in frustration.

“She didn’t trick us, she just didn’t really know what we were asking,” said a tired-sounding Kuroha. “We should ask someone else,” she suggested, and everyone had no choice but to agree.

We asked any number of people walking by. But not one of them would tell us where they sold booby mousepads.

When one person responded, “What the hell are you talking about?” and I replied, “A piece of fine art!” forcefully, a women called out to me from beside us.

“If you’re looking for art, I can show you a place,” she said.

She got our hopes up, but all she did was try to sell us some paintings. And of course, they didn’t show anyone’s panties or scenes of pretty girls losing their clothing... just paintings of scenery.

Is this really that *AKIHABARA?!*

“I’m sorry, Gin-san,” said Yuzu-san.

You don’t need to apologize, Yuzu-san! I was just annoyed at how un-AKIHABARA-esque the paintings were.

After that, we continued to wander around AKIHABARA for a little while. *Where in the world can we buy a booby mousepad?* We didn’t have any leads. We were starting to get pretty tired.

“Nii...” Miru had been really good so far, but she looked like she was reaching her limit. “I’m bored.”

“Miru, be a good girl, okay?” Kuroha cautioned.

“But this is so boring.”

Hey! If you say that, Yuzu-san is gonna feel responsible!

I was a little worried, so I looked at Yuzu-san. She smiled a little, bent over, and met eyes with Miru. “You’re right. We’re tired, and this is boring. Let’s do something fun!”

Ah, she’s more angel than human! Thank you so much...

“Are you sure?” asked Kuroha, clearly not wanting to impose.

“Yes. After all, we can watch Japan Shopping Network on my TV at home.”

That made sense to me. *Then, what should we do now?*

“Nii, I want one of those,” Miru said.

“One of what?”

“A hugging pillow cover.” Unlike booby mousepads, we knew what hugging pillow covers were. We had even seen some in the museum.

But...

“We can’t buy anything. We don’t have any money,” said Kuroha. We were penniless in this era, and every yen we used came from Yuzu-san. We couldn’t put her in even more debt just for our sakes.

But Yuzu-san quickly got on board with the idea. “Hugging pillows can’t be more than twenty thousand yen, right? Let’s buy one!”

Kuroha and I were against it, but it seems like it wasn’t much of a burden to Yuzu-san, so we decided to let her buy us one.

We’re in your debt.

“It’s nice that you said you would buy one, but we don’t know where they are sold, right?” said Kuroha with a troubled look on her face.

“Gotta ask someone, then,” I replied. That was what the situation called for. I hoped whoever I asked would be nice, but it was hard to tell if they would just by looking at people.

“Nii, there’s a robot guide over there,” said Miru, pointing across the way.

When I looked, I saw a girl that looked very artificial standing on the corner of

the intersection. It looked like she had been made so that people could easily recognize her as a robot.

Okay, let's ask that robot!

As we approached the robot guide, something seemed odd. She wasn't moving at all, and a crowd of people were around her taking pictures. It felt more like some kind of exhibition or attraction. The girl had on a pink outfit, and was a little larger than Miru. Next to the girl was a sign that read "Magical Girl Super Sadie Motion Picture Commemorative Full Size Figure," but all I could read was the "Sadie" written in hiragana.

Wait... "Sadie"?

"It doesn't seem to be a robot guide. Let's go, Onii-chan."

"Wait, Kuroha. A statue of Sadie? Could this be the one that's worth 50 billion yen?!" I was extremely excited, but Kuroha kept walking right past with a "First things first!"

Awww.....

I caught up behind everyone reluctantly. When I did, I saw a young woman dressed as a maid handing out flyers.

Maybe I should ask her? She probably wouldn't know, though...

I asked her about hugging pillow covers. And she responded.

"You can buy those at Toranoana, or Mandarake, or Melon Books!" she told us clearly and confidently. She said she often bought *doujinshi* from those stores. She even told us exactly where they were.

You know what they say, when in trouble, ask a maid! I made a mental note to recommend that Yuzu-san hire a maid.

We arrived at one of the stores she recommended, and asked where the hugging pillow covers were sold. Illustrations of girls were covering the walls, and it seemed like we had to choose which one we wanted a cover for.

Well, this isn't easy. All these girls are cute. It's hard to choose.

"Miru, which one do you want?" I asked.

“The marshmallow one!”

“There isn’t one of a marshmallow,” said Kuroha, with a strained smile.

“Kuroha-kun, what Miru-chan is saying is that she wants a girl with her panties just slipping off, her face ever so-slighted flushed, and her skin as white as marshmallows. You have to almost hear the sound of the panties slipping off...” explained Odaira-sensei.

“Please die,” requested Kuroha.

“Miru, it doesn’t look like they have one with pictures of marshmallows on it, so we have to choose a different one,” I explained, and Miru started thinking about it.

“I want one that’s cute like an oni,” she said.

Um, what’s that supposed to mean? To me, they all looked cute.

“Yuzu-san, which of these would you call cute?” asked Kuroha.

“Um... My brother really loved this kind of stuff, but I don’t really know very much. Why don’t we decide by all pointing at one?”

“And choose whichever gets the most votes? Sounds like a plan,” replied Kuroha.

Everyone else agreed, and when I gave the signal, we all pointed at one of the illustrations. I choose one where the girl had blonde hair and a black hair accessory.

“Ah!”

“Ah...”

Yuzu-san and I had both pointed to the same girl, and our hands had bumped into each other a little bit.

“S-Sorry...” I apologized and pulled back my hand.

Yuzu-san had a bashful smile, and her face was flushed.

Ba-dump! My heart pounded.

“Um... So you also want her, Gin-san? Why did you choose her?”

“Because she wore a black accessory with her blonde hair. Honestly speaking, that’s really my type.” That was the style Homyura had, after all.

“Oh, my...”

“Why did you choose her, Yuzu-san?”

“I just stuck out my hand randomly.”

Coincidence? I wondered. *No, more like a miracle!*

Yuzu-san and I smiled.

“...Are we done here, then?” a voice cut in from the side, coldly. Looking over, I saw Kuroha pouting with her arms crossed. She looked like a statue of Ashura, with an ever-so-slightly cross look on her face.

“Uh, okay... Miru, are you okay with this one?” I asked.

“Any of them is fine.”

Wait, didn’t you say you wanted one that was cute like an oni?

And so we bought it. The hugging pillow cover had an illustration with a picture of a girl in a school uniform on the front, and a swimsuit on the back. The picture on the back was quite sexy, but this was a piece of fine art, after all, so it wasn’t anything uncouth, of course.

We handed over the cover to Miru, and she looked at it intently and said, “I’m gonna put it on.”

Roger that.

Her small little body fit snuggly into the extra large pillow cover. A walking hugging pillow cover had now appeared in the store. It looked a lot like a worm walking upright.

“When we get back to the future, will you wear one of my little sister covers for me, Miru-chan? A little sister-covered little sister! Like the doors opening to Nirvana... Ah... It’s so...” Odaira-sensei looked enraptured.

“I’m glad you like it, Miru,” I said.

“Yeah!” said the moving pillow cover brightly.

It felt nice to do good things for people. There was nothing more fulfilling than a family that cared for each other.

“Onii-chan...” interjected Kuroha while I was basking in the warm feelings. She moved next to me with her eyebrows furled.

“The other customers are staring at us. Did we do something really strange, maybe?”

I am finally in my happy place, and she goes and says something like that?!

“Hey now! Don’t be jealous. You can have your turn in the cover afterward,” I said.

“Jealous?! Are you dense or something? No, thank you!” sputtered Kuroha, averting her gaze from me.

Her mood sours just like that! What a little hothead.

Kuroha let out a surprised, “Oh!” She was looking at something carefully. “Onii-chan, look at that,” she said, pointing at a shelf.

A white tag there said “booby mousepads.” It was written in all katakana and hiragana, so I was able to read it.

Yuzu-san noticed the tag, as well. We exchanged glances...

Mission... accomplished?

In the end, we weren’t able to buy the item. That store didn’t carry the *Magical Girl Super Sadie* booby mousepad. It was a limited edition product, so they had sold out of it awhile back. But since we were there, we bought a booby mousepad of a different character instead. It was a beautiful girl called “関羽”... I gathered the name was pronounced “Kan’u.”

Kuroha taught me that the 羽 kanji meant “feather.” It gave me an image of giant fluttering white wings... *How incredibly beautiful! If I have a daughter, I’d love to name her that.*

We were all starting to get sleepy, so we headed home.

“Sorry we couldn’t find it,” I consoled Yuzu-san as we walked back to AKIHABARA Station.

“We did what we could. I guess we should just go home now and buy it from the Japan Shopping Network.” Even though she was clearly exhausted, Yuzu-san still said it with a smile.

I agreed that it was the right decision. The Japan Shopping Network had “Japan” in its name, so it was basically a given that it would sell fine art products like booby mousepads.

We rumbled back from AKIHABARA to OKUTAMA on the trains. They shook a lot more in this era, and it was even more noticeable when we were so tired. At first we continued to talk, but soon words came less and less, and we all fell silent.

We sat, sinking deep on the long seat, spacing out. Yuzu-san, Kuroha, and Miru were on the seat across from me, leaning on each other, asleep.

“Gin-kun.” We were about to reach OKUTAMA when Odaira-sensei sitting next to me spoke. “What did you think about today?”

“What do you mean?”

“About the moe.”

“The moe?” I questioned.

Odaira-sensei’s expression sunk. “Honestly, I was extremely disappointed. The moe in this era is much less than what I had anticipated. I thought it would have spread far more than it has,” he continued.

I remembered the things we saw that day, like AKIHABARA and the rest of TOKYO that we had seen from the train window. Just like Odaira-sensei said, there wasn’t much moe anywhere. Aside from AKIHABARA, we had hardly seen anything moe at all.

“There was only a little hint of it in AKIHABARA. But that’s not nearly enough,” he continued.

“This is back when the Prime Minister was still a real person, after all,” I answered.

I had seen it on the news we’d watched in the electronics store. They had showed the Prime Minister, and he was most definitely just a flesh and blood old

man. In our time period, it would have been an unbelievable sight.

In the 23rd century, the role of Prime Minister was handled by a 2D character of an adorable girl. During the second half of the 22nd century, they changed the Prime Minister from a person to a 2D character in order to counteract the apathy the citizens showed toward government. It was extremely effective, and the people had started caring a whole lot more.

There were some movements out there that were against having the Prime Minister be a 2D character, but personally I thought she was adorable, and I loved her a lot.

“I suppose moe has not yet become such an integrated part of the citizenry,” I added.

“Don’t worry. Anytime now, it will explode and become the center of culture.

Ah, but Nyamo-chan really is adorable...”

I said, wistfully.

Nyamo-chan was the 7th 2D Prime Minister. She was officially a second-year in middle school, and “The People’s Little Sister.”

“Personally, I’d prefer someone a little younger,” said Odaira-sensei.

“Maybe next election, we’ll finally elect an elementary schooler?” I wondered aloud.

“I kind of wish they’d skip right to a ten-year-old. Then she can scold us citizens. The Japanese people need to be whipped into shape, I say!”

“They need to be lectured by a ten-year-old?”

Odaira-sensei let out a “Ah!” and his face started going red almost instantaneously. “Ah... Being whipped by a ten-year-old... Oh, this is a new one... I think I’ve awakened something in me...!”

Awakened? From the conversation we were having, I gathered he must have been talking about something political. His face was now bright red, and he was shaking. To the outside observer, it looked like a blonde, twin-tailed elementary schooler was super happy about something.

With Odaira-sensei off in his own little world, I thought about Nyamo-chan's innocent smile. Every day, that smile gave me energy. But it had been more than a week since I had seen her. It had been only a few days, but I already found the thought nostalgic.

We still hadn't found any way to return to the future. I wondered what would become of us. Would we end up living in this time period for the rest of our lives?

I thought if we at least could figure out what caused us to travel through time, we could do something about it, but it was so incredible a phenomenon that there was nothing we could gather at all. There wasn't anything to even investigate. And it was not like we could rely on Yuzu-san's kindness forever.

I looked over at Yuzu-san, who was snoozing softly on the seat across from me. Looking at her sleeping there so defenselessly, I felt a strange attraction, and I started to blush thinking about it.

The train arrived shortly after in OKUTAMA. We were all tired from our adventure in AKIHABARA and went to sleep immediately. I had hoped to sleep like a log until morning, but I woke up in the middle of the night.

Looking at the clock, it said it was 2 in the morning. *I bet everyone else is asleep.*

I left my room to go to the bathroom. I was careful to walk silently along the hallway, and to step quietly down the stairs, since the bathroom was on the first floor.

After finishing my business, I started to head back up to the second floor, but I noticed that the light was on in the first floor living room.

I was curious and had a look. I saw a girl in pajamas sitting on the couch.

It was Yuzu-san.

Her back was facing me, but I could tell that it was shaking slightly. I could hear a sniffling from her now and again.

Could she be crying? I trembled. I felt like I had seen something that I shouldn't have. *Perhaps I should leave...*

I tried to go back without making a noise, but when I touched the door, it

made a squeaking sound.

“...Is somebody there?” A voice came out from the figure in the center of the room. Yuzu-san had noticed me.

“It’s me.”

“Gin-san?” She looked at me. Her eyes were red, and there were tears on her cheeks. It was impudent of me, but I thought that her teary eyes and face flushed from crying were a little bit charming.

“The light was on, so I... Sorry.”

Yuzu-san quickly tried wiping off her tears. “I’m embarrassed,” she said, smiling even as her eyes showed her sadness.

There was an awkward silence between us.

What could have happened to have her crying by herself in the middle of the night? Honestly, I was curious.

“Um, Yuzu-san...”

“Yes...?”

“If you’re okay with it, would you like to tell me about it?” Maybe this was prying. But I couldn’t just leave her to cry on her own.

“Yes, I’ll tell you,” said Yuzu-san. She was still on the verge of crying, but she nodded.

I sat across diagonally from Yuzu-san on the couch. On the table, I saw a silver-colored box. The lid had “海苔 (nori)” printed on it, but I couldn’t understand the letters. Below, “Box” was written in handwriting.

It must be a treasure box.

Considering how rich her family was, this had to be a very high tech security box.

“I apologized to my brother, since we weren’t able to buy the thing he wanted,” she said, opening the box. She took out a picture from inside, and laid it in front of me. It was a picture of a blonde girl and a boy with black hair. I assumed it was Yuzu-san and her brother.

“I was really obsessed with my onii-chan,” Yuzu-san said.

“He must have been really kind to you.” He was thin, with big, thick glasses, and looked like a calm boy.

“Yes, he was so very kind.” Tears started to well up in her eyes. “He resembled you a bit, Gin-san.”

“You think so?” I took a hard look at the picture of her brother. *Hmm, I don’t see it.*

The thing that really stood out about her brother was his glasses. Since I didn’t wear glasses, it was hard to compare.

“You look similar around your eyes and lips.”

“You really look closely, don’t you?”

“We girls pay attention to details, you know,” she said, smiling a little. Smiling, but still not happy. “I have so many memories of my brother. We used to play pretend a lot.”

I started to get a little jealous. I had never played pretend with my sisters. They both only liked reading and drawing.

“And then when I got bigger, we would play little piggy all the time.”

“Little piggy?”

“My brother would play the pig.”

“And what role did you play, Yuzu-san?”

“The trainer.”

Wow, cool! “So there were pig trainers in this era? I’ve never heard of that before! What kinds of things do they make them do?”

“It was more about the things I didn’t let him do.”

Didn’t let him do?

“I’d go like this, and tie him up...” Yuzu-san made gestures like she was tying something up with a rope. “He’d cry out, ‘Please, let me go!’ but I would never, ever let him go.”

“Let him go where?”

“To the bathroom.”

“Oh, I see. Holding it in is a concept in philosophy. I read a book like that, once.”

“What do you mean, there was a book about it?”

“It’s literature from the future.”

“Oh, my.” Yuzu-san smiled, but her pretty face quickly clouded over again.

Hearing all this, there was something I just really had to know. Usually asking this would have been a bad idea, but the way the conversation was going, I figured now would be the time. I built up the courage and inquired, “Um... How did your brother pass away?”

“He died from an illness.”

Ah, as I thought.

“It’s thanks to him that I’ve been able to live to this day.”

“So he was just that important to you...”

“Yes. And there is another reason, too. ...Um, can I talk to you about it?”

I nodded yes.

“Actually, I’m adopted,” she said. I looked into her eyes on instinct. “It seems I was abandoned at an orphanage when I was a baby.”

So her parents are a mystery.

“I was adopted by my father when I was a baby. My mother was against it, but since my father wanted a little girl, he convinced her.” Tears started to fall from Yuzu-san’s eyes. Perhaps emotions had overcome her, as she was speaking more than usual.

“When I was little, my father was so kind to me. But when I got bigger, he got more and more distant. My mother hated me from the beginning, and so I just became a nuisance to them...”

What a horrible story. Do they have no sense of responsibility?!

“My brother said that he understood how my father felt. He said that once I was packing an elementary school backpack, I was already ‘out.’ That I didn’t make him ‘breathe heavy.’”

“Breath heavy?” I asked.

“I don’t understand, either,” Yuzu-san replied.

“Yeah...”

“My brother used to say that Father should just ‘hurry up and discover the wonders of 2D.’”

“How considerate of him.”

“Yes, he was very thoughtful like that. Unlike Father, he never changed how he treated me.”

Now I understand why you hold such strong feelings for your brother.

“I wanted to buy the booby mousepad in order to honor his memory. He told me to buy it when it was on sale and place it at his grave from the hospital bed. And in a really loud voice, too.”

“So that’s what it was,” I replied.

Yuzu-san fell silent once again. Her crestfallen face was heartbreaking.

I was debating whether or not to say something to her when she wiped her tears with the sleeve of her pajamas, straightened up her face, and looked at me.

“Gin-san, I want to fulfill my brother’s wishes.”

“His wishes?”

“Yes. This was the girl my brother really loved,” she said, pointing to the table. There was a single book there, with an illustration of a girl in a pink costume. I had seen her before: it was *Magical Girl Super Sadie.*

“My brother had his own worries. It seems like he wasn’t getting along with his friends at school.”

“...Some things never change between eras, I suppose. Was there something that caused it?”

“I heard that the people in his class saw him talking to the girl in that picture. He yelled out something like, ‘Punish me more!’”

“That’s what it was?”

Poor guy... Talking to 2D girls was an everyday thing in my time period.

“And he was seen groveling on the floor and licking the picture, as well.”

“That’s even more normal!” Odaira-sensei had said that he made sure to lick illustrations of his little sisters all over each day. And if Odaira-sensei did it, that meant it must be normal.

One thing was clear. Her brother had been born in the wrong era. He had been killed by the times!

“Like how I was saved by my brother, I think he was saved by this girl character,” said Yuzu-san.

“Every person needs to be saved by something, that’s true.” It was a fact I knew well. I had been saved by *Oniaka.*

“My brother wished strongly that other people would understand his tastes. He said that if he were in a world that accepted moe, that he would have been able to proudly tell everyone he was Sadie’s manslave. His favorite thing to say was, ‘Please, let moe spread far and wide!’”

Indeed! To think a person would exist in this era with such passion!

“I really don’t know much about this sort of thing, but I want to respect my brother’s wish,” Yuzu-san said, smiling.

It was not her usual smile that was like a beam of warm sunshine. Perhaps because she was remembering her dead brother, it was a smile with a hint of sadness. It was fleeting, and seemed as if it could be broken off with just the slightest jostle.

I have to protect her! Something began to well up from deep within my stomach. *Is this what they call... chivalry?!*

Yuzu-san had taken us in without a second thought, accepting us into her house. And she was, all by herself, trying to stand up to this era itself. *I must help her in any way I can!*

I yelled out without hesitation. “Please, allow me to help you!”

Yuzu-san opened up her eyes and looked at me.

“Together, you and I... Let’s spread moe throughout this era!” I said.

“...That makes me very happy. But I can’t trouble you with something like this.”

I leaned in closer to her, so that our faces were right next to each other. “Trouble? I’m the one who is causing all this trouble for you! I beg of you, let me repay you the favor!”

Yuzu-san kept smiling, but wouldn’t respond. She seemed to be unsure.

Come on, already! Fine, then I’m going to say it... Maybe it was unfair to use this to convince her, but I had no other choice.

“Yuzu-san, actually... I’m also adopted.”

Yuzu-san looked startled.

“So, I think I understand how you feel more than other people.”

The looks people gave us... The loneliness... I knew those feelings well. Like being left alone on an island, looking out over to the busy shore of the mainland with envy. It was a special kind of solitude.

I had been saved from that negative thinking by *Oniaka.* And Yuzu-san had been saved by her brother. No wonder she felt so strongly about doing something for her brother even after he had passed away. And that desire had been made even more acute by the cold way she was treated by her parents.

“You must think that you don’t have anyone else you can turn to, now that you’ve lost your brother, right? If I were in your shoes, I know that’s how I would feel.”

“Well...”

“I’ll be there for you! You’re not alone anymore!”

“Please, don’t say that. You’re going to make me start relying on you...”

“Please, rely on me!” I showed her my biggest, brightest smile.

Yuzu-san avoided eye contact for a second, and then glanced at me. She sighed, and clasped her hands to her chest. “Gin-san, you are a scary person. If I’m not careful, you’re going to steal something precious...”

“No, no... I won’t do just *anything* you ask. Like, I won’t steal stuff for you.”

Yuzu-san burst out in laughter. “Just talking to you makes me feel better, Gin-san. You’re a really nice person.” She stared intently at me. “Please, will you let me rely on you? Gin-san, thank you so much.”

I bowed politely. “I’m in your service. And thank *you* very much.”

We exchanged glances. *Burning... Something is burning deep in my heart!*

“By the way, what exactly are we going to do?” I asked.

“My brother used to say this all the time,” said Yuzu-san, with a flash of will in her eyes. “‘Start by encroaching on the school!’”

“Encroaching?”

“My brother went to the same school as I do. I think he meant we should spread moe first in my school.”

“I see... I wish I could see that school firsthand.”

“Oh, about that...” Yuzu-san’s teary eyes narrowed as she spoke. “Gin-san, would you like to transfer in?”

“Transfer? You mean I would go to the same school as you, Yuzu-san?!”

She grinned at me.

You’re kidding me!

But my life seemed to be one joke coming true after another.

I was now going to 21st-century high school. And it was all thanks to the financial power of the Mirokuin family that it was even possible.

It turned out that the Mirokuins had contributed a lot to the endowment of the school Yuzu-san attended, Hakumei Academy, and that was the leverage she had used to make it happen.

It had taken a few days to get all the paperwork in order, but I was now walking alongside Yuzu-san on the way to my first day at school.

“I’ll be in the same class as you, right, Yuzu-san?”

“That’s right. And I also made sure to request a specific seat for you.”

I was not able to read kanji. I needed Yuzu-san next to me to help me read and write.

There wasn’t enough time to order me a uniform, but it seems like my SCHOOL UNIFORM fashion was quite similar to the school uniforms of this era.

I guess I’ll just be going to school like this for a little while.

What is school like in the Heisei era, anyway? I was sure I would be shocked.

Perhaps I can use it as material for my novels. Just imagining the possibilities filled me with anticipation.

“This is gonna be so fun!”

“Would you calm yourself down already?” a cool voice retorted from the opposite side of Yuzu-san. It was a voice I had heard almost every day for more than ten years.

Kuroha was also walking alongside us.

“We’re not here to play around, remember?” she reminded us.

Kuroha was also wearing her usual outfit. Her Heisei-taste old school style looked quite similar to Yuzu-san’s school uniform. Supposedly it wouldn’t be out of place for her to go to school wearing something like that.

Why was Kuroha walking alongside us, you might ask? It was because she had also decided to attend the school.

It had all happened a few days earlier...

The day after Yuzu-san and my late-night tête-à-tête, I announced the results to Kuroha while we were sitting around the breakfast table.

“I’ll be attending her school.”

Kuroha did a spit-take with her miso soup. “What the hell is this all of a sudden? You’re kidding, right?”

I explained the situation to her. At first she didn’t believe I was being serious, but when Yuzu-san spoke about her brother and how important he was to her, she realized that it wasn’t a joke.

“Honestly, I’m not sure I even know where to start with you, it’s all so ridiculous... Yuzu-san’s brother, Yuzu-san, and you, Onii-chan.”

“There is no need for words,” I said. “There are some things that a man must do!”

“Gin-san...” said Yuzu-san, quietly.

Kuroha paused from eating, and looked displeased at both of us. “I’m not going to be able to stop you, am I?”

“Not a chance.”

“Then I’m going, too.”

Say what? But then, Odaira-sensei and Miru (who had been listening quietly), both got excited.

“What an interesting proposition! I think I shall go, as well!”

“I wanna go, too! Can I?”

Yuzu-san looked a bit apprehensive. “U-Um... I think it might be a little difficult for you two, considering...” They both looked like elementary schoolers, after all. No matter how much financial influence the Mirokuin family might have, transferring them into a high school would not have been possible.

“Miru, I’m sorry, you’ll have to stay home with Sensei. And if he tries anything, just stab him to death with that,” said Kuroha, pointing to a large knife hanging on the wall of the kitchen.

Hey, what if Miru takes you seriously?

“A kitchen knife, huh? That’s nice and *yandere*...” muttered Odaira-sensei, seeming to not let it bother him.

“Kuroha, are you sure about going to school?” I asked.

“Of course. You can barely read any kanji, Onii-chan! How in the world will you manage by yourself? It’s dangerous. Don’t go deciding things on your own without asking my permission first.”

“Why should I have to get your permission? And besides, I won’t be alone. Yuzu-san will be there with me.”

“Do you have any idea how much of a burden that will be on her?! Looking after you is going to be incredibly stressful for her.”

“It’s not stressful for me at all. I’m looking forward to it,” replied Yuzu-san, cheerfully.

“Kuroha, you don’t have to force yourself to go. Yuzu-san and I will go together.”

“That’s no good! Absolutely no way!” Kuroha’s eyes went bloodshot and she

banged the table with her fist, causing waves in her bowl of miso soup. “I am going to school with you, and that’s final! If you tell me no, I’ll sew your feet to the floor, damn it!”

Now that’s what I call a threat! Is she gonna use that knife to do the sewing or something?!

I had no choice but to nod my acceptance under pressure.

First Year Class 3. This was our class. Yuzu-san was also in the same class.

I was a year ahead of Kuroha and Yuzu-san, but we had me transfer in to the same year as them. We applied together posing that Kuroha and I were twins.

When we reached the school, Yuzu-san headed straight to the classroom, but Kuroha and I went to the teacher’s office. We were told the teacher in charge of us wanted to introduce themselves to us.

As we were led from the teacher’s office to our classroom, another classroom came into view from the hallway.

...What’s that? There was a big board at the front of the classroom. It looked like a teacher was writing letters by directly scratching some kind of white stick on it. *How primitive...*

Glancing at the seated students, they all had relaxed looks on their faces. Perhaps it was representative of all the people from this time period. This was just how things were in the Heisei “good ol’ days,” I figured.

“Kuroha, look. Everyone has this plain look on their faces. You can really see the times,” I said.

“Didn’t you see them before?” she asked. “I don’t think they look so different from our time, though.”

You need to get your eyes checked.

“Oh, yeah. Make sure you don’t tell anyone that we’re from the future, Onii-chan.”

“Why not?”

“Because they’ll think you’re nuts. If you’re not careful, you might even get

expelled.”

“That’s just discriminatory... The society of this era is still so immature. I’ll have to be careful, I suppose.”

“The thing that’s immature is that brain in your head, Onii-chan.”

We followed the teacher into First Year Class 3’s classroom.

When Kuroha entered, I could hear voices from the students saying, “What a babe!” “She’s so pretty—” “I’d kill for hair like that...” Hearing my sister complimented like that made me feel happy, as well.

Next, when I entered the classroom...

“Look at the stand up collar.” “They still make *gakuran* uniforms like that?” “I wonder what school he’s from?”

I could hear the word *gakuran* here and there. *What can that mean? Is it something literary, or maybe intellectual?*

First, the teacher was going to introduce us while we waited to the side.

Taking a look at the other students, there was one girl whose beauty made her stand out from the others. She looked like a black and white illustration with color used in just a few places...

It was Yuzu-san.

Yuzu-san looked at me and gave me a bright smile. With that, all my nerves flew away.

“Now then, if you two could please introduce yourselves to the class?” The teacher motioned to us.

Kuroha started to step forward, but I put my hand out and stopped her. “Kuroha, let me show you how it’s done.”

“Huh? Wait...”

When making friends in a new environment, first impressions are crucial. As her older brother, I felt I should help show Kuroha how to make a proper introduction.

I stood in front of the class. *Okay, I’m ready to do this!*

Introducing myself verbally would be fine, but since I had this big board here, I figured I would make use of it. I took the white stick and wrote my name and birth date in the middle of the board.

GIN IMOSE – BORN YEAR 2185 MONTH 4 DAY 12

I gave my introduction with energy and in a loud voice. “How do you do? I am Gin Imose. My clothing may give you too strong an impression that I am an intellectual, but you will find that on the inside, I am a compassionate and kind person. Please, everyone call me Gin. I look forward to learning with you all!”

Yup, that was an intro without fault! I wonder how the students reacted to it?

I scanned the classroom—

W-W-Wha? Something’s not right.

I was expecting their faces to be filled with curiosity about their new transfer student, welcoming looks, or even unwelcoming looks... But there were none of those. If I were to describe the faces of my classmates in the style of Odaira-sensei, I would say something like this:

EYEZ OPEN WIDE ◎ MOUTHZ ON FLOOR ◇ FACEZ SHOCK ☆

“This is exactly what I was just talking about! Think about what year this is right now!” Kuroha jumped in.

“What year? It’s... Oh...”

Oopsy. It was 201X.

“Listen. I’m going to clean up this mess, so just stay quiet. Not a peep!” said Kuroha, stepping up in front of the class.

“Um, that was a joke,” she said.

No one reacted to her. The classroom was as silent as it was before.

“You know, to break the ice?”

Silence.

“I know how he must seem to people right now, okay? But let me just say it... You’re supposed to laugh now.”

Again silence... or not?

Yuzu-san started to laugh out loud. The rest of the class began to follow along and started smiling.

Thankfully, it seemed like the fact I came from the future was still a secret to everyone. *Thank you, Kuroha. Thank you, Yuzu-san.*

But I had spoken too soon.

People had already seen through the fact that I had come from the future. Kuroha's cover-up had not been effective.

The moment homeroom was over a voice called out to me, "Hey, Futureboy!"

Oh no, what will I do?! Kuroha had said that they might expel me if they found out I'm from the future, after all.

"Kuroha, I'm in big trouble!" As I explained the situation, she sighed so long that I thought she might run out of breath.

"Um, that's just a nickname."

Let me come clean about something. I had assumed that as a student from the 23rd century, my academic abilities would have far exceeded those of 21st century students. I had imagined that all the other students would be shocked by my amazing knowledge, and would beg me to help them study.

I was from 200 years into the future. Wouldn't the education from my time far exceed that of the past? It was not out of the question. But the reality of it was the complete opposite.

It was now Japanese class.

"Gin Imose-kun, would you please read from the textbook." I responded with a "Yes!" and stood up, looking down at the textbook.

It was 暮方 on that 日.

Kanji right off the bat! I mean yeah, it's Japanese class, but shouldn't a high school textbook be geared more towards normal people? There should have been more hiragana...

I was in trouble. I decided to try reading just the parts I could, and try and fake

it.

“‘It was... on that...’”

A chill came over the class.

Is that good enough, I wonder?

In the tension-filled room, the teacher said, “Hmm, could you please repeat that from the beginning?” showing no mercy.

Crap! It didn’t look like just reading the hiragana parts would be enough to get by.

“Gin-san, you read that as, ‘It was dusk on that day,’” whispered Yuzu-san from the seat next to mine.

O-Okay, got it. Thanks, Yuzu-san!

“‘You read that as it was dusk on that day,’” I read to the class.

The class burst into laughter immediately. It seems I had said something strange, thanks to my nerves.

Th-This is hard... I had steeled myself for a challenge with Japanese class, but it was far worse than I had feared. The other subjects were similarly difficult to understand, with the exception of English. *Why does everything have to be so high-level?*

The teacher laughed it off with a “All right, that’s enough...” and I sat down dejectedly.

“Gin-san, I apologize for not being clear,” said Yuzu-san.

“Don’t worry about that. I’m sorry for making so much trouble for you all the time.”

“Oh, I don’t mind at all. I’m having fun,” she replied with a warm smile.

Ahh... She’s truly an angel on Earth. It must be against the rules for a girl as unbelievably beautiful as her to be so kind, as well.

I wanted to keep Yuzu-san’s very existence a secret from everyone. If the world found out about her, she’d clearly be treated as some kind of unknown life form. I wouldn’t want that. Maybe it was selfish of me, but I didn’t want her smiling at

so many other people...

As I became sucked deeper and deeper into Yuzu-san's smile, I felt a stare hitting the back of my head like a laser beam. Turning around, I locked eyes with Kuroha from her seat by the window.

Yikes... What a face! You look like some kind of Noh demon mask!

I was actually impressed that such a face was even possible. Perhaps she had a future in the performing arts.

There was a reason that Kuroha was making such an angry face. She had gotten a seat separated from us. Our seats were on the hallway side, but Kuroha was next to the window. The teacher had decided on the seating, it seemed. So Kuroha must have been angry about being left out, but there was nothing she could do about it.

During class, Kuroha continued to follow me with her assassin's stare. If you could kill with a stare, I would have seen the gates of hell twenty times over, at least.

"Kuroha-san seems worried about you, Gin-san," Yuzu-san said. It seemed she had also noticed Kuroha's fearsome stare.

Don't look straight into her eyes! It's scary!

It wasn't long before class was over. A number of students got up from their seats. Kuroha left her seat and strode over to us intently, like some manifestation of anger on the attack.

I was frightened and I turned my back to her. But what I saw was that before I had realized it, Yuzu-san had been surrounded by other boys. *Are they friends of hers?* It totally threw me off.

It looked like the boys were inviting Yuzu-san out to things. "Karaoke, or maybe an arcade? How about a movie, whatever you want!" they were saying.

Yuzu-san was greeting them all with a smile, but I wondered what exactly was her relationship with them. *Hmm...*

"A movie? Actually I've never seen a movie in a movie theater before."

"What?! Then perfect! Let's all go to a movie together!" All the boys nodded

together. One of them started checking movie times on his cellphone, and a number of films that were currently showing were listed.

I was curious, so I chimed in. “That movie there... How many of the heroines in it grow into giants?”

All the boys turned to look at me.

“In the era we’re from, all the entertainment films have parts where the heroine turns into a giant,” I explained. “Like where the giant-sized heroine from the Milky Way battles the bad heroine giant from another universe.”

“Giant-sized? What the hell is this guy talking about?” The boys all seemed taken aback from what I had said.

“Aha... Well, there’s this one, actually,” said one of the boys. He fiddled on his phone, and with a teasing smile showed it to me. There was a picture of a girl in a pink outfit.

Magical Girl Super Sadie — The Movie —

This was... It was the anime that Yuzu-san’s brother loved so much!

He read the text aloud. “‘Hurry up and kneel before me! It is I, Sadie, master of a thousand sadisms, here to abuse you! 1,000 names will be drawn in a lottery to win a special alarm clock which will awaken you with my abusive voice!’ it says.”

“Well at least it knows its target audience,” said another boy.

Hey now! Don’t laugh at Sadie *in front of Yuzu-san! That’s the same as laughing at her brother!* I was indignant.

I looked over at Yuzu-san’s face and, as expected, it was tinged with sadness.

Damn it, I can’t let this stand. Who the hell do these boys think they are? They have no idea about Yuzu-san’s feelings!

I stood up, not able to stand it any more, my chair falling to the ground with a clatter behind me. “Don’t you laugh! Isn’t Sadie cute?”

“Wh-What?”

“Why are you laughing? Are you making fun of moe?!”

“You’re supposed to laugh at stuff like this, right? I mean, even the creators

know it's a joke."

"You're wrong!" I cried. "The creators are thinking, 'Someone is going to be saved by my work'! That's what telling a tale is for! To say it is a joke is disrespectful!"

"Man, it hurts just to listen to this guy," said one of the boys.

It hurts?! What hurts here is Yuzu-san's heart! Yuzu-san was looking at me and the other boys, uneasily. *What can I do to make her smile again...? Ah, it's gotta be that!*

"Yuzu-san!" I got down on one knee before her. I was posing like a knight before his queen. "Will you go to a movie with me? To watch *Sadie*!" I yelled it out with a booming voice, and extended my hand to her.

Yuzu-san and the boys both looked down on me with stunned faces.

"Yuzu-chan would never watch something like that!" one boy objected.

"Yuzu-*chan*?! If you dare to address her that way, then you must call me 'Gin-chan,' as well!"

"Huh? That doesn't make any sense..."

"Let's go see *Sadie* and get verbally abused! We can buy the pamphlet and lick her picture, groveling on the ground!" *Just like your brother did! Yuzu-san, come now, take my hand!*

Yuzu-san blinked a few times in surprise. She looked at me in silence for a moment, then knelt down on the floor in front of me and clasped both of her hands around mine.

"Gin-san, I'll be happy to go see a movie with you."

"Okay!" *Yes! I'm going to see a movie with Yuzu-san!*

Yuzu-san looked at me with a delicate smile. While I was still enchanted, she let go of my hand and stood up. The look on her face changed to one of regret, and she bowed her head to the boys.

"I know that you asked me first, but I'm sorry," she said.

The boys all had their own nasty looks on their faces.

“Damn it. Who gives a shit about moe, anyway?”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me...”

The boys all spat out throwaway lines at me as they exited into the hallway.

I stood up and faced Yuzu-san. A big smile came back over her face.

“Gin-san, thank you for standing up for something my brother liked.”

“I just did what anyone else would have done.”

“I was surprised at how serious you got. You raised your voice really loud... It was echoing through the classroom, you know. Especially ‘Lick her picture.’”

“When I get serious, I naturally raise my voice.”

“That’s a lot like my brother.”

“Maybe I’m being possessed by your brother.”

“Oh my, Gin-san...” Tears started to well up in her eyes. They seemed almost hot.

She must have been crying because of those boys laughing at *Sadie*.

Don’t worry, everything will be okay. There’s no need to cry anymore.

Yuzu-san took a short breather, and then looked toward the hallway where the boys had gone.

“Maybe I did something not so nice...” she said.

“Yeah... Maybe it would be a good idea to make up with them.” I didn’t think they had been trying to be mean. They just had not yet realized the appeal of moe. I really wished I could have them read *Oniaka*. I definitely recommended Homyura’s panty flashes and panty shots.

“Gin-san, um, about the movie...” Yuzu-san was looking back at me and seemed embarrassed. “When did you want to go?”

“Well, it’s the two of us going, so...”

“—I want to go with you.”

Gya! An eerie voice came from behind me. I felt a wave of wrath pass through my entire body. *What an incredibly ominous aura!* I turned around, fearing the

worst.

There stood the ultimate evil, Kuroha...

“I’m just kidding.”

...or not? Kuroha had calmed down. *What an anticlimax.*

“I don’t really want to point this out, but if you’re going to see a movie, you don’t have any money, Onii-chan. You’re just going to trouble Yuzu-san more.”

“It’s no trouble at all. I’m happy to pay for a movie or two,” said Yuzu-san.

“Yuzu-san, stop spoiling my brother.”

“But, Gin-san did invite me and all...” replied Yuzu-san.

Kuroha’s temples started to pulse.

“I don’t have many opportunities to go see a movie with someone,” Yuzu-san continued.

I was wrong about Kuroha having calmed down. Her eyes were rapidly glancing up and down, her hair was standing upright... She looked like a Tibetan god of wrath. *She’s taken face-making to an entirely new level!*

“NO!!!”

I could feel the pressure from her voice, which boomed out, filled with bass.

Yuzu-san was taken aback, and nodded. “Never mind, then...”

Grr... It seemed like it wouldn’t be possible for me to go see a movie with Yuzu-san. *What a shame...* However it was true that I didn’t have any money, so there wasn’t anything I could do about it. *Maybe I should look for a part-time job?*

I had given up on going to the movies, but it seemed like Yuzu-san had not.

“What about if you come as well, Kuroha-san?”

“What?” Kuroha was no longer in the form of a Tibetan god of wrath, and had returned to being human.

“We can all go together. Let’s bring Miru-chan and Sensei, as well!”

“Wouldn’t that mean you’d have to pay for all of us, then?”

“I’ll be fine! Let’s all go together!” Yuzu-san was smiling and filled with expectation.

The Mirokuin family was rich, so movie tickets shouldn’t be that much of an expense for them, but...

Kuroha was wavering, but Yuzu-san clinched it with an “It’s decided!”

Yuzu-san, thank you so much for everything you’ve done for me.

So, now I was going to a movie with Yuzu-san, together with Kuroha and everyone else. I was looking forward to it.

...Wait a second. If we’re already going as a group, then... “I just had a good idea! Why don’t we invite all the boys to see *Sadie,* as well?”

“Oh, that sounds like it would be a lot of fun and excitement.”

“You mean, go together with those guys? Onii-chan, wouldn’t that make you feel awkward?”

“Why would it?”

“It’s that part of you that I actually have to give my respect, Onii-chan. Seriously.”

Okay then, let’s all go to the movies! I’ll show those guys just what’s so great about 2D girls!

I went and invited all the boys who had come back into the classroom to the movie. I figured they’d say okay, but they all said no way.

After yelling “Let’s go have Sadie tell us off!” the third time, they said, “Please stop, it’s embarrassing just listening to you!” and flatly refused.

I don’t get the sensibilities of the people of the past!

After school, Kuroha came over to my seat.

“So, do you have any good ideas?”

“Good ideas?”

Kuroha put her hand to her forehead and sighed. “Onii-chan, why did you come to this school in the first place?”

Why had I come here? That was because—

“Wait, why was it again?” I looked over beside me to Yuzu-san for help.

“You wanted to study and make friends at school, Gin-san,” she said.

Ah yes, that’s right.

“Sheesh! It’s because of Yuzu-san’s brother, remember?!” yelled Kuroha.

“Oh yeah, that’s what it was!”

“And how is that going exactly?”

She was right. I had come to this school to help fulfill Yuzu-san’s brother’s wishes. But like Kuroha was saying, I had yet to do a thing.

“Yuzu-san, it might bring back painful memories, but I’d like to just double check on some things. Your brother went to school but became isolated from everyone else in his class. His isolation was because he did a lot of normal everyday things like talking to 2D girls and licking them all over. Am I getting anything wrong?”

“No, that’s correct,” confirmed Yuzu-san.

“Onii-chan, are you sure those are normal things to do?” Kuroha asked. “They seem more like things related to his particular tastes. Maybe they were things people shouldn’t do?”

“Kuroha, Yuzu-san is standing right in front of us!” I stared at my sister. *How dare she speak ill of the dead!*

“If you think it was her brother’s actions that were the problem, then why don’t we test that theory out? I’ll just do the same things in front of my classmates as he did.”

“Please don’t! You’ve embarrassed yourself enough as it is. Do you want to become some kind of legend at the school?”

“Legend! I like the sound of that.”

“Whoops, I shouldn’t have said that. I forgot how stupid you were.”

“There are times when everyone in the school gathers for assemblies, you know!” suggested Yuzu-san, helpfully.

“You mean do it in front of the entire school, not just the class? That definitely sounds like I’d get my name in the school’s history books.”

“Yuzu-san, please don’t encourage him. He’ll actually do it, you know.”

“What? Did I say something wrong?” Yuzu-san asked.

You didn’t say a thing wrong, Yuzu-san! Kuroha is the person that’s wrong here!

“You want to spread moe, right? Don’t you have anything that will get the attention of a lot of students?” asked Kuroha.

“And if I did, then what?” I replied.

“Then, maybe you could preach to everyone why moe is so great?”

“How about I give a lecture at the school assembly? If I couldn’t, then I could get Odaira-sensei to do it. He looks like a little girl, so that’s sure to be effective!” After all, the prime minister was a cute little 2D girl in the future!

“Nobody is going to listen to a little brat’s propaganda in this era,” Kuroha said flatly.

“Propa...? You’re using big words to make fun of me again! Cut it out!”

“You’re the one who needs to cut it out already!”

“Um...” Yuzu-san interjected, trying to stop our little face-off. “I have something like this.” I wasn’t sure when she had pulled it out, but she was holding a thin book in her hands. It was black and white and was bound with tape. It looked like something that was handmade, rather than mass-produced for sale. “This is the literature club’s magazine.”

“Magazine...” I repeated. *Yuzu-san, what are you saying we should do with that magazine?*

After school the next day, we headed to the literature club, holding applications in our hands. According to Yuzu-san, the literature club’s quarterly magazine was handed out to all the classes in the school. If we could publish a short story in the magazine, we might be able to spread moe.

When I volunteered to write the story, Kuroha was dead-set against it. She said

that if there was some mistake and it actually got published, that it would just confuse and provoke everyone at the school.

I guess the Heisei era isn't ready for my novels yet.

In that case... I had a wonderful idea. With this plan, we were sure to succeed.

We had reached the literature club room. Opening the door, we saw a single student. She was sitting in a chair reading a book, and she glanced at us when she noticed us.

She stood up, and I saw she was wearing glasses and had her hair pulled back in a bun. She had straight eyebrows. She looked like someone who was extremely serious.

"Oh? Aren't you the first-year Mirokuin-san?"

"Are you two acquainted?" I asked, and the glasses-wearing girl turned toward me.

"No. Mirokuin-san is quite famous," the girl responded.

I see. Yuzu-san would naturally draw people to her, and the Mirokuin family clearly had a lot of power at this school, so it wasn't surprising that she was so well known.

"What business do you have here?" the glasses girl asked.

"Right. We'd like to join your club." Yuzu-san handed over our three club applications.

"...Understood. Please sit over there. I am the club president." Kuroha, Yuzu-san, the club president, and I sat down around the long table. It seemed like she was going to explain the activities of the club to us.

"There are many people who come in with incorrect expectations, so let me make myself clear right from the start. Our club is for writing works of *literature*, not mere stories for people's amusement."

She spoke with conviction, emphasizing each individual word clearly. At first I thought she was angry, but it seemed like this was how she usually spoke.

"There are some novels that are written like... manga... But if you wish to write

trash like that, then our club is not for you. Feel free to take your business elsewhere."

"I prefer works of literature over frivolous entertainment," I answered with complete honesty.

"Excellent. What kinds of books do you enjoy?"

What books do I like? There were many, but if I had to pick one, it would have to be—

"*I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby!*"

She was silent for a moment.

"...That is not a title that I have heard of. What is it about?"

"If I had to summarize, I'd say it was a crying-non-blood-related-little-sister-moe work."

"Little sister moe?" She grimaced. "I was pretty sure I explained earlier about the type of literature we valued here..." Her words were filled with disdain.

"*Oniaka* is the very definition of literature. The epitome of the Orthodox style," I argued with passion.

"Onii-chan." Next to me Kuroha started speaking to me in a quiet voice. "*Oniaka* hasn't been released in this time yet."

"Ah, that's right."

The club president looked at us mistrustingly, but then suddenly stood up. She took a book off of a bookshelf and returned to the table.

"We make a magazine. Take a look, as it should show you the kind of work we are inclined toward." She pointed to the magazine.

On the cover in big letters was written 青雲 (seiun/blue sky). I flipped through the pages, and as expected, I could hardly read anything at all. I pretended to read some, and then handed it to Kuroha.

I decided to continue the conversation as Kuroha was reading it. I winked at Yuzu-san. She nodded, and pulled out an envelope from her bag.

"Please, let us join your club. We will write a story for your magazine's next

issue.”

“I have no problem with that, but I should let you know that there is no guarantee you will be included.”

It seemed like only works that got her approval were included.

“Yes, we understand that.” Yuzu-san opened the envelope and took out the contents. It was a stack of paper.

What we had brought with us was Odaira-sensei’s manuscript. The previous night, we had explained to him the situation, and he had let us borrow it.

His work should be relatively close to a moe work of the Heisei era. And of course there was nothing to be worried about when it came to the quality. If we could get it published in the magazine, moe would be sure to spread throughout the school.

Of course we realized that people of this time period wouldn’t be able to understand 23rd century Japanese writing. The Japanese used was just too different. That was why we had brought the manuscripts he had written in modern Japanese to help him clear his mind instead.

“Please read this.” Yuzu-san handed over the manuscript to the club president.

“I will.” She adjusted her glasses and looked down at the manuscript.

It was Odaira-sensei’s newest work. It was based on real people, and was a tragic love story.

You should be honored to read the newest work from a famous author in the future, you know. Just take it all in!

“Ah!” Suddenly, Yuzu-san’s face turned pale.

“What’s the matter?”

“I messed up.”

“Messed up?” I had a bad feeling about this.

“Sensei said to take whichever one we wanted, right?”

“Whichever?”

“The one that looked normalish, or the one that had all the hiragana...” She must have meant the one written in 21st century modern Japanese or the one in 23rd century current-day Japanese.

Which means...

Yuzu-san must have taken the manuscript written in current-day Japanese by mistake. This meant that the club president was currently reading a tragic family love story that went like this...

COMESIN→MIU IMORE=PANTIESONDISPLAY

COMESIN→RAI ORAIRA=ONIINYAN

MIU=PANTIESONDISPLAY: “ONIINYAN, ONIINYAN, LUV U”

ORAIRA: “LUV U 2”

MIU=PANTIESONDISPLAY: “LUV U MORE THAN REAL BROTHER”

ORAIRA: “SO HAPPY-NYO”

MIU=PANTIESONDISPLAY: “LUV U MORE THAN REAL SISTER”

ORAIRA: “SO HAPPY-NYO”

MIU=PANTIESONDISPLAY: “ONIINYAN SMART, RICH”

ORAIRA: “NYO-NYO-NYO”

MIU=PANTIESONDISPLAY: “HURRY AND PROPOSE”

ORAIRA: “I WILL LOTS AND LOTS”

TWO LOVEY DOVEY

BUT

REAL BROTHER REAL SISTER GET IN WAY!

HARUMPH☆

COMESIN→KIN IMORE

KIN: “LUV MIU”

PANTIESONDISPLAY: “MIU LUV RAI-NIINYAN”

KIN: “SHOKKU”←*dies*

COMESIN→KUROHYA IMORE

KUROHYA: “MIU COME HERE”

PANTIESONDISPLAY: “NO”

KUROHYA: “HYAA”←*dies*

—We were thrown out of the clubroom.

Our plan ended in utter failure.

Far from being chosen for publication, we had been thrown immediately out of the clubroom as if banished like evil spirits. The look on the club president's face was as if she had just seen some sort of horrible crime.

So frustrating!

But we were not going to throw in the towel just yet.

That evening, after we had cleaned up after dinner and were all gathered around just hanging out, Yuzu-san came over to us.

"I'll write it myself!" she proclaimed, her eyes sparkling.

But I knew from experience that writing a novel was not something you could do so easily.

"The problem was that it was written using current-day Japanese. If we showed her the modern Japanese version, I'm sure she we could win her over," I explained.

"No, I think that this is really something that I need to do myself." Yuzu-san had her hands clenched tightly into fists. She looked very determined.

"All right, then. I will do anything and everything in my power to assist you."

"Honestly, it's probably better if you assist her as little as possible, Onii-chan," said Kuroha, coldly. "The types of stories in the club magazine and the ones you like are just way too different."

"Oh, shut it. You know, no one asked for your opinion. I'll help her out all I can."

"Yeah. You go do that."

While we argued, Miru trotted over and looked up at me, "What's this about?"

Should I tell Miru about the literary club magazine? As I wondered, Odaira-sensei interjected. "Why don't we all help?" he said, rubbing his forehead.

I looked over at Yuzu-san to gauge her opinion. This was all in order to fulfill her brother's wish. She shouldn't allow other people to participate without careful consideration. *What will you do, Yuzu-san?*

“Everyone, I’ll be glad for your help!” she nodded, bursting out in a smile.

Okay then, we’ll all work together!

After some discussion, it was decided that Odaira-sensei would help with the prose, and Miru would provide the insert illustrations. I was the special adviser, which it seemed primarily consisted of cheering her on. Odaira-sensei urged me multiple times not to give my opinion on the content.

Of course! I understand that this is Yuzu-san’s work, not mine.

“What’re you gonna do, Nee?” asked Miru.

“Me...?” Kuroha was in an awkward position. After saying what she had, it must have been hard for her to help out.

“Kuroha-san, would you like to help check the clothing of the characters?” Yuzu-san looked over to Kuroha with her saving smile.

“Clothing?”

“Right. I am not very knowledgeable about fashion. I’d probably have all the characters wearing jerseys. Kuroha-san, would you give me advice?”

“But, I’m not from this time period...”

“Please,” Yuzu-san said. “I really don’t have the confidence to do it myself.”

“Okay, then let me ask you something,” Kuroha said. “What do you think about my brother’s outfit?”

“I think it’s black and cool-looking. I was actually curious about where to get something like that. Did you buy it in the city?”

“‘In the city,’ she says...” muttered Kuroha, laughing a little.

Hey, what’s funny? I totally bought it in the city!

I had bought my SCHOOL UNIFORM at a men’s clothing store in front of the train station called “Fashion Murata.”

“You two are siblings, and it shows in your similar fashion sense,” Yuzu-san added.

“What?! In what way?”

“Well, your stockings are black, right? They match Gin-san’s clothing.”

“Color isn’t the only thing that matters about fashion! And besides, I wear them not because of fashion, but because of family tradition.” The Imose family has a tradition where women all wear black stockings after they turn 15 years old.

“Oh, my. What a wonderful tradition,” Yuzu-san said.

“I’m gonna wear black stockings. Then I’ll rip ‘em, and rock Nii’s world,” Miru put in.

“Miru-chan, don’t do it! You’re thinking like a dirty old man! Don’t cover your so-smooth-I-could-just-rub-my-cheeks-on-them baby-white legs!” Odaira-sensei cautioned.

“First: Not a wonderful tradition. Second: Miru, you’re too young for that. Third: Sensei, you’re a disgusting pervert and I hate you.” After Kuroha finished her series of comebacks, she nodded to Yuzu-san. “Fine, I’ll help you out.”

Yuzu-san must have asked Kuroha for fashion advice out of consideration. Here she was, participating in the group again. *Yuzu-san really is so considerate.*

Yuzu-san’s brother, please look at us! We’re all working together to encroach on the school. And one day, the world will be a place where anyone can laugh, proudly proclaiming themselves to be Sadie’s manslave!

The next morning, I saw Yuzu-san and Kuroha head out into the garden.

Are they going to tend the garden?

I wanted to help, so I followed them.

After entering the garden, they sat down on the bench that was there; Yuzu-san with her blonde hair and Kuroha next to her with her black hair. I was walking up behind them and was about to call out, but I stopped myself.

I could only see Yuzu-san from the side, but she had a serious look on her face that I had never seen before. It made me hesitate to get any closer.

“—About the story... I was thinking to write about a girl who has feelings for her non-blood-related older brother.” I could hear Yuzu-san faintly. It seemed like she was talking about the story she was going to write.

I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I hid myself behind the shadow of a tree and listened in on their conversation.

“You see, actually, I’m not related to my brother by blood,” Yuzu-san continued.

“You’re not?!”

I could sense how shocked Kuroha was. *Oh, Yuzu-san hadn’t explained that part yet?*

“That’s right. I was adopted.”

“I see... So you’re going to write about yourself?”

“That was my plan, but Sensei said something to me. He said that it wasn’t good for your work to reflect yourself too closely.”

“...I’m impressed he can say something like that.”

“That’s why I decided against just writing about me and my brother.”

“You’re not going to write about a brother and sister?”

“I am, but I decided to make the brother adopted instead of the sister.”

Kuroha was silent for a little bit. *I wonder what kind of look she has on her face?*

“...So then, you’re asking me how I... place my brother in my mind?” she said at last.

“Yes.”

“Okay. By the way, Miru-chan doesn’t know he’s adopted, so don’t say anything.”

“Of course I won’t say a thing. I would really like to hear your feelings for Gin-san. To help inspire my story, of course.”

Kuroha’s feelings about me? Whoa, I’m getting kind of embarrassed for some reason. I started to feel itchy all over.

“I just think of him as my brother, that’s all,” replied Kuroha plainly.

“Is that really all?”

“Yes, that’s all.”

“...Really?”

“Yeah.”

“But, you really seem to worry about him a lot, Kuroha-san.”

“Uh...” She was silent for a moment. But then I heard her continue, seeming defeated. “I want you to promise not to tell him anything I’m about to say, okay?”

“I promise.”

“Well... I can’t help but worry about him. After hearing the things he heard, he was really depressed for a time.”

“What things?”

“He overheard some things that a really inconsiderate relative said to our parents back when he was little. ‘If only you’d known you were going to have Kuroha, then you would have never gone and adopted Gin.’”

“Oh, my...”

“Thinking about it now, it wasn’t said to be mean or anything. But he was very little, and he didn’t know that he was adopted before that. It was a huge shock to him.”

Was that the first time I learned I was adopted? My uncle had thought that Kuroha and I were asleep, which is why he had let his guard down like that.

“So, you feel responsible for him, Kuroha-san?”

“I’m not that nice a person. But when I think about the times he’s had this sad look on his face when I wasn’t looking, I get worried about him.”

Kuroha... I worried you, didn’t I? I’m sorry. But I’m better now.

At the time I had been really down, but then I met *Oniaka* for the first time. My innocent obsession with Homyura had healed my wounds. It was actually that uncle who had been the one to introduce me to *Oniaka*, so I felt thankful to him.

“So you want him to be by your side because you worry about him,” continued Yuzu-san.

“It’s not like I want him by my side, exactly...” Kuroha stopped herself. There was a brief pause. “Actually, if I’m being honest with myself, what I really want is to put a collar on him and keep him from wandering about.”

A collar?! Am I a pet dog?! I pictured myself with a collar and a leash, with my owner Kuroha next to me. Oh, and since I was the dog, I was naked.

“So in other words, you love him?”

“Huh?!” Kuroha let out a hysteric yelp. I almost stood up myself.

Yuzu-san, what in the world are you saying?!

“How in the world did you get ‘love’ from that?!”

“Those are exactly the feelings I want to write about. I don’t want the feelings of the little sister I’m going to write about to be vague.”

“O-Okay...”

“Do. You. Love. Him?” Yuzu-san asked with all her conviction. Kuroha was silent for a few seconds, and then sighed out a few words.

“I love him... maybe.”

The world came to a stop. I felt like my head was going to go completely blank. *Kuroha thinks that way about me? This has got to be some kind of joke, right?!*

“Oh no! It seems I have asked you something I shouldn’t have.”

“Uh, w-wait. Like, when I said love, I didn’t mean, like, *love* love. I meant like brother-sister love, you k-know? I just want him to succeed, and when he’s having fun, I feel good too, and I know everything about him, so...”

“You’re really not proving your case.”

“But it’s not like that!”

...Oh... Well, yeah, I guess that’s what I should have thought.

I couldn’t have even imagined a world in which Kuroha had romantic feelings toward me. She’d been my little sister ever since she was born, after all. I liked *Oniaka*, but that was 2D, not reality.

But... is Oniaka *really that much different than reality?*

“Please, stop teasing me.”

“I’m not trying to tease you at all.”

“Then how about you, Yuzu-san? How did you feel about your brother?”

“Unlike you, Kuroha-san, I relied a lot on my brother.”

“Did you love him?”

“Yes. I loved him, but it wasn’t a romantic love. To me, he was the only family I had.”

“Yeah, I see...” It was difficult for Kuroha to answer that.

“You can’t fall in love romantically with someone who’s like your big brother, let alone your actual big brother,” continued Yuzu-san.

“Of course not, yeah.”

“Yes.” And that’s where the two’s conversation ended. There was a strange tension that remained.

I decided that had been enough eavesdropping, and made my way silently to the front door. But then I heard voices from behind me.

“Kuroha-san, please help me write the story, as well. Let’s put all those feelings you have about Gin-san in there!”

“Okay, it’ll be good to have it reflect feelings.” I could hear that Kuroha seemed slightly excited. Her words stirred my heart just a little bit.

Yuzu-san finished the story in ten days. The title was *Ani MAJI Mania* (Crazy for Big Brother), and I was the one that came up with it.

It evoked the powerful and all encompassing feelings that Yuzu-san had about her brother. Also, the title had an amazingly clever trick to it. When it dawned on me, for a moment there I honestly thought I was a genius. If you don’t see it, try reading the title backwards, like “A-ni-ma-ji-ma-ni-a.”

As for the story, it was your usual *gimai* story. The main character was an adopted orphan, and he had a non-blood-related little sister.

The descriptions of the feelings of the sister were very detailed, it seemed. Since it was written in modern Japanese, I couldn’t actually read it, of course.

According to Kuroha and Odaira-sensei, it was written using a lot of hiragana and katakana and was closer to current-day Japanese than not, but after trying to read some, I didn’t understand a thing.

Miru drew about ten illustrations for the cover and inside. Each picture was really a detailed masterwork, and she had added a little bit of a touch of *Sadie* to

them, which Yuzu-san's brother had loved so much.

With our newest work proudly in tow, we once again prepared to dive into the literature club. Since it was a team effort, we even brought Miru and Odaira-sensei along.

We're ready for you, Ms. Club President! Bring it on!

For the second time, we arrived at the literature club clubroom. In an orderly line, we entered the room one after another. The club president was there. We didn't see any other club members.

She's here alone again? Is the club not popular or something?

"What, you people again? Don't just come waltzing in here. I'm going to call a teacher!" she yelled at us.

You clearly have a problem with rudeness. We're not here to rob you, you know!

"Please, give us another chance!" Yuzu-san stepped forward and handed over the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania*. "We wish to be published in your magazine."

The club president's face stiffened up, but she took the manuscript.

"...I'll read it, but this is the last time, okay?"

"Understood." Yuzu-san nodded worriedly.

We all sat down around the table. On one side was the club president, on the other were the five of us.

She began to read the manuscript, looking down, and her glasses flashed. This time, she didn't freak out on the very first page. She continued to read it very seriously.

Now then, what do you think about it? Her expression didn't change at all while she read it. I had no idea how she felt about it. I could do nothing but sit there, anxiously.

After more than an hour and a half of tension, the club president finished reading. She lifted up her head, and tapped the manuscript sheets on the table

gathering them together with a “tap-tap.”

“It’s far better than the thing you had me read before.” *Oh! That’s a pretty good sign!*

Suddenly a weight had been lifted from the room. Yuzu-san smiled happily.

“However!” The club president immediately threw cold water all over our happiness. “It is as low-brow a work as they come.” *What?!* My blood began to boil.

“First problem: What in the world is this picture?” She pointed to one of the insert illustrations.

It was a scene where the heroine was changing. She was wearing all manner of things on her upper body; a knit cap, a muffler, gloves, and a thick winter coat. Aside from her face, she wasn’t showing any skin on her upper body. On the other hand, she wasn’t wearing anything on her lower body at all except one pair of panties, and those were almost slipping off.

“This is completely unrealistic.”

“Of course it’s realistic. Are you blind?” said Miru caustically. After all, she was the one who had drawn it.

“How so? Why would someone take everything off on the bottom first?”

“Oh, about that. It’s my fetish.” Odaira-sensei raised his hand. “Bundled up all snug on top and completely nude on bottom. It really gets your juices pumping, don’t you think?” Odaira-sensei puffed out his chest proudly as he spoke, as if there was not even the slightest wavering of his conviction.

“I-I have no idea what you are talking about.” The club president must have been taken aback by Odaira-sensei’s commanding presence, because she was shaken a little bit.

“Well, illustrations aren’t my specialty, so I’ll let them slide I suppose. But the content itself is incredibly idiotic.” She narrowed her eyes. “What the hell is this? Seeing his sister’s panties, a bath scene with no purpose to the plot... Do you really like this sort of stuff, Mirokuin-san?”

“Well about that...” Yuzu-san didn’t have anything to say.

“I despise it,” said the club president, flatly.

The literary panty flashes and bath scenes weren’t Yuzu-san’s taste. They had been put in because Odaira-sensei had said they were “absolutely necessary.”

“Those parts are just asides, you know? You need to focus on the main story,” Kuroha was the one to calmly respond.

“The main story?” The club president laughed bitterly. “The adopted older brother and little sister? How trite. And how easily the sister fell in love with the brother.”

“How easily? I think there were plenty of complications along the way...” Kuroha’s voice lowered in tone.

“You think? To me, it seemed like all the characters were just conveniently doing exactly whatever the author wanted them to.”

“That’s not it at all.”

“So they’re not blood-related, so what? They’re still brother and sister. It might not be explicitly stated in the text, but they are clearly romantically in love with each other. It’s totally unbelievable, right? That’s exactly what I meant by it seeming like the author just willed the characters to do whatever.”

“Th-They aren’t romantically in love at all!” stammered Kuroha.

“On the contrary, they were in the very definition of a romantic relationship.”

In the future, stories about falling in love with your non-blood-related sister were the staples of literature.

“This little sister is modeled after you, am I right Mirokuin-san?” the club president continued. “You want to have an incestuous relationship with your immediate family? I think I’m going to be sick. Are you right in the head?”

Why, you... There are some things you just don’t say like that! Not being able to stand it any longer, I stood up.

“There is nothing wrong with Yuzu-san! She is the one that’s right!”

The room went silent. I could tell that everyone was staring at me.

The club president was taken aback for a moment by the forcefulness of my

statement, but she then replied resolutely. “When you consider the story and the illustrations, this is what they call the moe genre, is it not? What in the hell possessed you to seriously write something like this?”

And you belittle it just because it’s called moe*?* Oniaka *is moe too, you know!*

“I was saved by *Oniaka*! My heart was healed by Homyura’s smile, by Homyura’s straight-forwardness, by Homyura’s panties!”

“P-Panties...? Enough with this idiocy!”

“Idiocy, you say? I’ll have you know that this will soon be the primary style of literature!”

“Don’t be foolish,” she snapped.

If only you knew...

“The world would never become like that. Even the masses would never fall to such depravity.”

“Why must you call it ‘depravity’?!”

“This type of vulgar trash is the very definition of depraved. The lowest of the low. Go read our literary magazine and learn for yourself what real literature is.”

She knows nothing! Sure, right now this type of work might be held in low regard. But why must she assume that it will always be that way into the future?!

Odaira-sensei had told me this as an example. Back in the Meiji era, novels were once treated as foolish trash that only women read. And the *kabuki* and *ukiyo-e* which we learned about in school were also viewed as low and crude. But as the times change, the value that is placed on things can change just like that!

“In the literary magazines of the future, there are illustrations of pretty girls on every page! Famous authors present their own individual views on panties, and debates are held on the merits of covering up virgin’s bits with a band-aid or not. That’s how the 23rd century is! The thing you call literature is nowhere near our literary magazines!” I really let loose.

“Are you trying to be a sci-fi author? Why are you talking like you know the future?”

“Because, of course—” *we are from the future,* was what I was about to say, but I held back. This person would never understand me, even if I told her. She would only think that I was crazy.

“—Okay, then. You know, it doesn’t matter whether or not this becomes the primary style.” It wouldn’t help to keep arguing about what was literature or not anymore. There was something even more important to not give in to...

“It’s too bad that this work isn’t to your taste. But to just look at the work superficially, and to even belittle Yuzu-san’s feelings like that... How dare you! *Ani MAJI Mania* holds all of Yuzu-san’s love for her brother!” I pounded the table in rage.

She crossed her arms and stretched out her back. Her arrogant attitude was, as ever, unchanged. “It’s idiocy.”

“Do not belittle Yuzu-san’s feelings!”

I felt Yuzu-san gasp.

“Regardless of how sincere Mirokuin-san’s feelings are, this novel will never be worthy of being called literature. I will never accept it.”

“How can you say that?!” I shouted. *When she is reading “novels,” what does she read? Isn’t she forgetting the most important part?* “Ms. Club President, what is a novel that you like?”

“*The Dancing Girl* by Mori Ogai.”

“That’s a treasured work, even in the future. There is an Orthodox style remake.”

“Remake?”

“They added illustrations from the popular artist Numajiru. And the main heroine, Elise, has silver hair with mismatched eye color to make her tiny and sexy-cute. They also added a few more girls to increase the harem factor, as well as enough panty flashes to satisfy the reader.”

“How horrid... Are you trying to demean *The Dancing Girl*?”

“No. What I’m saying is that because of the remake, *DANCE GIRL* has once again regained its high reputation.”

“Unbelievable. And in that case, it would no longer be *The Dancing Girl*.”

She’s a real stubborn one.

“You have to understand... When the times change, so does the culture. Works must put on the trappings to match the times to be popular. But you are claiming that those trappings are what makes the work itself!”

“That is not what I am saying.”

“It is so. You will not allow yourself to see Yuzu-san’s feelings that are hidden within *Ani MAJI Mania*. And you won’t accept the remake of *DANCE GIRL*. You discard a work just because it’s labeled as moe without a second’s consideration. You are someone who only judges a book by its cover!” I yelled out in a loud voice, jabbing a finger at the club president.

“I told you, that’s not true!”

“It *is* true! You have no eye for recognizing the true nature of a story!”

“The true nature? And what is this ‘true nature’ of which you speak?”

With all the feeling in my body, I pummeled her with my words. “The feelings contained within the work. To put it more strongly, a person’s heart!”

As the times change, literature changes. Words change. And yet! People’s hearts never change! That’s what I believe!

I had been saved by *Oniaka*, and by the heart of the work, the feelings of love for the older brother contained within it! Residing in *Oniaka* were the feelings of a person that transcended time!

Perhaps she could never understand moe, as a person from the past. But she must have the ability to grasp the true root of a work, the heart of a person. *Ms. Club President, open your eyes!*

I met her fierce gaze eye-to-eye. I appealed to her wordlessly. I wanted her to understand.

But...

“...What kind of childish thing is that? A person’s heart?” Her attitude was unchanged.

Damn it! Will nothing I say change her mind? Is this what they call a generation gap? I was about to be disappointed, but then the club president's defenses began to slightly crumble.

"So childish, and yet you can say embarrassing things like p-panties without hesitation..." Her face had gone red.

"Why shouldn't the heroine show everyone her panties?"

"But, the character of the work..."

"Character of the work? Don't be so pretentious! If you are the club president, then have confidence in your own words! Go and write a vivid panty flash scene, I dare you! And if you cannot, then never speak the word 'literature' again!"

"Like you know a thing about my writing! What about you, then?"

"Gladly! I will write one right here, right now!" I took a deep breath and looked at everyone. "It's a battle, then! Someone, show me your panties for inspiration! Now, hurry up!" I yelled, and Kuroha stood up without saying a word.

Yes! She will reveal her panties for me. You are indeed my beloved sister!

Embarrassed, Kuroha hid her eyes and bravely lifted up her—

Wait, what are you...

—hand.

Before I had a chance to react, she slapped me hard across the face.

Ow! That hurt!

"Cut it out, you *hentai*!" Kuroha snarled.

H-Hentai is a compliment, you know...

The battle was over. Yuzu-san and the rest all came to the conclusion that any further struggle was worthless. Maybe because I had gotten so heated, everyone else reacted coolly. Yuzu-san bowed to the club president again and again, apologizing for causing her so much trouble.

*How vexing...*In the end, we were unable to move the club president's heart. My heart was overcome with the feeling of defeat.

The club president stood there silently with her arms still crossed. The sun had already begun to set, and seeing her back-lit, her chest puffed out like that, was extremely irritating.

What was her name, anyway?

“Ms. Club President, I admit defeat. Would you at least tell me your name?”

“As you wish.” She nodded, and introduced herself. “I am Kuroka Imose.”

“Imose?” My eyebrows twitched. It was the family name I had used these past 17 years, after all.

Could it be that she is... No, no. There’s no way such a coincidence like...

There was no longer any reason for us to be in the room, so we left. I was curious about something right before exiting, and looked back at the club president’s thin legs.

They were clad in black stockings.

Our shadows stretched out from the setting sun on the way back from the school. Kuroha, Miru, and Odaira-sensei walked in front, with Yuzu-san and myself in the back. Having not achieved our desired result, our heavy footsteps plodded one after another.

“I’m sorry. In the end, I wasn’t helpful at all,” I said.

“Gin-san, please don’t give up. It was so fun creating a story together with everyone.” Yuzu-san rescued me from my feelings of powerlessness with her smile.

“It really helps for me to hear that. Let’s think of another plan.”

Yuzu-san looked from me to everyone else, and replied with a cheerful “Yes!”

“Anyway, I always knew you were a passionate person, Gin-san, but...” she continued.

Remembering my exchange with the club president, I got a little embarrassed. I had overdone it back there. “I’m ashamed.”

“Oh, don’t be. It really made me happy.” Yuzu-san’s footsteps were light. I felt like she was in a happy mood, even though we had lost the battle.

“Ha ha...” Yuzu-san laughed suddenly. “But Gin-san, I’m sorry, you seemed to have misunderstood something.”

“Huh?”

“It’s true that *Ani MAJI Mania* contains my feelings for my brother, but it’s really more about...”

When Yuzu-san said this, suddenly Kuroha swung around from in front of us. She had her eyebrows furled and was looking at Yuzu-san.

“...Never mind.” Yuzu-san decided against saying whatever she was planning.

I wonder what it was?

“Having siblings is really great, you know?” Yuzu-san whispered as she looked toward the setting sun. Perhaps she was remembering her brother. “Hey, Gin-san...”

“Yes?”

“Please, be my brother.” She said it so suddenly...

“Huh?” “Wait a...” Kuroha and I sputtered.

“If I asked you that, would you?” Yuzu-san continued.

“A-are you being serious?”

“No, just kidding.” She laughed as if something were funny.

Was that really a joke, I wonder?

Yuzu-san’s cheeks flushed red. It wasn’t just because of the light from the sunset, I was sure. “Gin-san, I’m going to put this precious story in my treasure box.” She tapped her bag with the manuscript in it. “I bet it’ll be really fun to read a long time from now. When I become an old woman I’ll read it again, and remember my feelings for my brother... I’ll probably grin like an idiot,” said Yuzu-san, and then looked at Kuroha.

Kuroha glanced back at Yuzu-san, and then at me. She began to twist her long, black hair in her fingers...

☆

For a very long time have I decided upon my own course of action. I will

threaten those authors who write in the Orthodox style. There are many possible candidates, but the best of the lot is the man whose popularity has spread even to international waters.

Gai Odaira.

If that bastard rejects the Orthodox style, it will surely have an immense effect upon the literature of this world. To threaten him, it would of course be advantageous to learn the whereabouts of his personal residence. It will be easy to approach.

The name Odaira brings back bitter memories of mine. There was one time, long ago, when I allowed him to read one of my works, and he laughed at it. He said that my novel lacked any of the rudimentary fundamentals of what was necessary for “moe,” and thus was a failure, an ill-fit for the current-day literature. At the time, I had been under the impression that the public taste was more what I had written, but it turned out to be the vile works of Odaira which were popular. My masterpiece went without recognition, and that Odaira’s frivolous schlock was acclaimed.

This world is a horrible place. There is nothing good in the entire world. Therefore, the world itself must be changed.

My enemy is the Orthodox literary style. Whoever it was who coined the shorthand Orthodox style deserves death a thousand times over.

Despite its name, the contents reflect nothing of the sort. The works are all nothing but male wish fulfillment of the most banal type.

The hideous book I forced myself to read through for future reference had the main plot of a boy that traveled to the past and fell in love with a girl he befriended.

Their time periods were completely different! There was no way they would fall for each other so easily!

If the barriers between men and women were truly so low, I should have been able to find a girlfriend or two myself! Put a stop to the parade of foolish fantasy!

And if, perchance, such a boy existed in reality?

I’d wring his little neck.

Chapter 4 - I Want To Have Onii-chan's Baby

"Gin-san, say 'Aah...'"

"Aah..."

Yuzu-san's chopsticks slowly approached my open mouth holding a piece of steak. The outside of the steak was grilled nicely, and the inside was tender. With each bite, the meat juices exploded in my mouth.

"Magnificent!"

"Gin-san, you're complimenting me too much."

It was lunch break at school. It had become a routine for Yuzu-san, Kuroha, and me to eat lunch together on the roof of the school building. We would lay down a sheet, sit ourselves down, and eat the home-made lunchboxes that Yuzu-san made.

"Gin-san, 'Aah...'"

Aah... Such happiness. Such blissful happiness. I was so happy, I was emitting a pink-colored aura.

Kuroha was emitting a pitch-black aura, but my aura of happiness was strong, and had created a protective barrier around me and Yuzu-san.

Yuzu-san's attitude toward me had changed recently. She would make eye contact more frequently, and she would strike up conversations more often. Even during class, I noticed that she would be looking over at me. I suspected I knew why this was happening.

According to Kuroha, I lacked a lot of common knowledge about the 21st century, and I would do strange things without realizing it. Yuzu-san must have been silently pointing out those times to me.

While we were eating, Yuzu-san asked me a question, seeming somewhat embarrassed.

"Gin-san, um... I was thinking about this last night. If you were going to have a

baby, what would you name them?”

Kuroha almost choked on her food.

“Oh, I wasn’t talking about having a baby with me, okay? I was just asking, you know, one day... Don’t get any wrong ideas!” Yuzu-san spoke quickly, flustered.

Don’t worry, I know what you meant.

“I haven’t given much thought about a boy, but if it’s a girl, there’s a name I’ve been thinking about.”

“What is it?”

“Kan’u.”

“Oh!”

“Onii-chan, you know I heard from Sensei about where that name comes from,” added Kuroha.

“It’s a very feminine name. I’d be nice if she grows into someone appropriate for that name.”

“You mean an old dude with a long beard...” muttered Kuroha.

Kuroha, what in the world are you talking about? We’re talking about girls here, not old men.

“That’s wonderful. Gin-san, say ‘Aah...’”

“Aah...”

Kuroha kept glaring at the two of us. Finally, she was no longer able to stand it and shouted, “I’m going to make one, too!”

“What? You’re also going to have a baby, Kuroha-san?” Yuzu-san said.

A shocking proclamation!

“Kuroha! You’re too young!” I cried. “Who is the father?”

“I never said anything about being pregnant! I was talking about making a lunchbox, sheesh!”

“You’re already planning on making lunches for your kid?”

“Now you’re just screwing with me!” Kuroha stood up and pointed at me forcefully. “I’m going to make a lunchbox for us, too! And you’ll be the poison-tester, Onii-chan!”

“Poison-tester? Don’t you mean taste-tester?”

“Gin-san, Kuroha-san is just embarrassed,” explained Yuzu-san.

“I am *not* embarrassed!”

“Then it’s okay if I am a poison-tester, as well?”

“No, I’m making Onii-chan do it!” Kuroha waved her arms around like a spoiled brat while Yuzu-san laughed gently.

It had been a month since we had started living in the 21st century. In the past weeks, we had gone with everyone to see *Sadie*, we had gotten food poisoning from Kuroha’s handmade lunchbox, I had gotten the lowest score ever on a test in the history of the school, we had tried to get our novel printed in the local neighborhood newspaper and had been chased out... We had had a lot of fun!

But we still had no idea about what caused us to travel through time. We thought we might end up living forever in the Heisei era.

Thanks to Yuzu-san, we had pretty much gotten used to the 21st century. I wasn’t going to go as far as to say we didn’t want to go back to the future, but we were prepared to accept the possibility of living the rest of our lives in this time period.

The one thing I was worried about was the results for the Newcomer’s Prize that I had submitted my latest work to. And the Homyura Prize ought to have been announced pretty soon, as well. If we couldn’t return to the future, at the least I wanted to know the results of the competition, I thought...

O God, please hear my tiny prayer!

It was afternoon on a Sunday. Kuroha and I were watching TV in the living room. Yuzu-san had gone out shopping for dinner, and Odaira-sensei was in his room writing. Miru was out sketching somewhere, I figured.

The TV was showing a variety program called *With Which?* People or things are split into an A group and a B group, and the show guests have to vote on one or

the other. Eventually either A or B gets chosen by process of elimination. We had programs similar to it in the 23rd century.

During a commercial break, Kuroha said, “Onii-chan, can I ask you something?” She was playing with her hair. “If A is dark hair, and B is light hair... which do you choose?”

“You mean like the TV program? In that case I’d go with light hair.”

“Dark” didn’t leave a good impression in my mind.

“...Okay, next. A is someone who is a loudmouth, B is someone who is reserved.”

“Well, I think the way you put it would bias my answer. But going by what you said, obviously the reserved person.” Being a loudmouth didn’t leave a good impression, either.

“Yeah... I’m not making it sound good, am I?” said Kuroha, muttering to herself. “Okay then, how about A is stockings, B is katyusha?”

“You mean if I were to cross-dress? Neither one. I’d go with a garter belt and high heels.”

“What?!”

The commercials were over, and we went back to watching the TV program. Thirty minutes later, when it was finished, Kuroha spoke again suddenly.

“Then, A is the 23rd century, B is the 21st century. Which now?”

I didn’t answer, and turned toward her, looking into her serious eyes. I could tell this wasn’t just a simple question.

“Do you think we’ll never go back?” she continued.

I knew it. Kuroha looked far more serious than she had earlier.

“What do you think, Onii-chan? Do you not want to go back?”

“I do want to go back, but...”

“You’re conflicted, aren’t you? Because Yuzu-san told you, ‘Be my big brother’ or something, right?”

Something like that had happened, indeed. I tried envisioning Yuzu-san calling me “Onii-san.” *Yeah, I think I like it. I think I really like it.* I started to blush.

Kuroha’s eyes narrowed in annoyance. She grabbed her black hair and slapped me across the face with it.

“I’m your little sister, got it?”

“Don’t forget about Miru!”

“Yeah, and Miru is, too! And Mom, and Dad...”

Mom and Dad...

Yuzu-san’s parents hadn’t been very caring, but it was different for me. My parents loved me so much that I was able to think of myself as a winner even after being an abandoned orphan. If time was flowing at the same rate in the future as here, we would have gone missing more than a month ago. They would be extremely worried about us. I missed seeing their happy faces.

But if we left, then Yuzu-san would go back to being alone. I didn’t want to leave Yuzu-san. I didn’t want to leave her smile, her cooking, her tears... All of them had taken root, deep within my heart. I already couldn’t imagine living a life without Yuzu-san.

“Aren’t you going to become an author, Onii-chan?”

“Yeah. It’s the one goal I will never give up on.”

“Then we have to go back to the future. You can’t write anything decent at all in this time period.”

“That’s not true. If I study, I’m sure I can do it.”

“Oh, yeah? Are there any kanji you have learned since we came here?”

“There are!”

“Write them for me.”

All right! Time to show her the fruits of my studies! I haven’t been going to school just for show, after all.

一 二 三

“How about that?” I asked, pointing to the kanji I had written: one, two, and three.

“Not bad. Go ahead, continue.”

Kuroha was right. I barely understand any kanji at all. Becoming an author in this time period would be extremely difficult. Not being able to read or write kanji made it hopeless.

And the cultural differences were also great. Novels written in the Orthodox style wouldn’t be accepted in this era.

Even in Akihabara, the existence of moe was still weak, and you could be ostracized in school just for saying you loved a 2D girl. I felt so sorry for this world that couldn’t understand moe.

Once, I had gained hope from *Oniaka*. Likewise, my wish was for a great number of people to gain hope from my own stories. But the place to fulfill that dream wasn’t the 21st century, it was the 23rd century.

Yes... I knew that. But this was the time period where Yuzu-san lived.

“Pursue your dream, Onii-chan,” said Kuroha, appealing to me, looking straight into my eyes.

I had made my decision. “You’re right. We have to go back. Thank you, Kuroha.”

“Yeah.”

“It’d be nice if we could take Yuzu-san, though...”

“...What?!”

That would solve all the problems, after all.

“Nii, Nee...” Miru had come into the living room. She was holding a plate of marshmallows.

“Weren’t you drawing?” I asked.

“I got bored.” Miru tottered over and put the plate on the table.

“Let’s all eat them together,” she said, sitting down on the couch.

“Mind if I join you?” Odaira-sensei appeared in the living room as well. It seemed like he needed a break from his writing.

We all sat around the table, and each grabbed a marshmallow.

“Sensei, how is the progress on your manuscript?”

“Going smoothly. It’s nice to hand-write things once in a while, you know?”

“With the change in environment, I bet your creativity will hit new levels.”

“Thank you. But there is something that is eating at me. Even if I finish the novel, here in the 21st century, no one will be interested in it. It’s not like I can rewrite the readers’ brains. I’m beginning to feel the era I belong in is the 23rd century.” Odaira-sensei looked depressed. He finally wanted to go back to the future.

“Do you want to go back, Miru?” asked Kuroha, as Miru popped a marshmallow into her mouth.

Miru thought for a second, and said, “I could go back, sure.”

Miru was only ten and really loved our parents, but since we had come to this time period I had never heard her say a single thing about missing the future. She must have not wanted to worry us and kept it all to herself. She was like that, not wanting to have people worry about her.

“Sensei, what do you think caused us to travel through time?”

“I have no idea, really. Could it be like a present from God answering my wish? No, couldn’t be...”

“Your wish?”

“Well, there was a time I wished to become a little girl and travel to the Heisei era, after all.”

“I see.”

“And if God is going to grant my wishes, there are other ones I’d rather have anyway. Like, I want to have a ten year old little sister. I have twenty little sisters living in my head, but I can’t actually reach out and touch them...” He trailed off with a happy look on his face.

Kuroha suddenly stood up and was about to escort Miru out of the room, but Miru hadn't eaten enough marshmallows and shied away from her like a cat.

Right then, we heard the creak of the front door opening.

"I'm home!" Yuzu-san called. She had returned from shopping for dinner. "Oh, you're all gathered together?" She popped her head into the living room. She was holding a plastic bag in her hand, and I could smell fresh green vegetables.

"We were having a snack," Kuroha explained.

"Oh, I see. Tonight I'm making eggplant and chicken sauté, Mexican style."

After telling us tonight's dinner menu, she headed to the kitchen. It sounded like we could look forward to another amazing dinner. I was about to thank her as she walked away, but...

Pipi...Pipi...Pipi...Pipi..

Suddenly, an alarm went off. It was quite loud, as if coming from somewhere nearby.

Is that the alarm on my cellphone? Yuzu-san must have thought it was something similar, because she took out her phone to check. That wasn't it, it seemed, since she put it back.

There wasn't anything like an alarm clock or timer in the living room. *Wait, isn't this sound...*

I looked around in distress. Odaira-sensei's body had started to flash.

"Ooh!" Odaira-sensei stood up in shock.

Next, Miru's body began to blink. "Nii, Nee..." Miru looked back and forth between me and Kuroha.

Then Kuroha and I started to blink. Alarms were ringing out from all four of our bodies.

"Onii-chan, this is..." Kuroha looked down at her own body, dumbfounded.

She was right. This had happened before. *Time travel!*

It must have been an act of God, like Odaira-sensei had said. No rhyme or reason, and not caring at all about our circumstances!

“What? What?” Yuzu-san was frozen and couldn’t figure out what she should do.

Pipipipipipipipipipipipipi!

The beeps of the alarm turned into a continuous tone. It wouldn’t be long until we disappeared. Which meant it wouldn’t be long until I would be separated from Yuzu-san.

Damn it! This is too sudden! Even if I wanted to take Yuzu-san with me, I didn’t know how. There weren’t any clues!

I don’t want this! I want to talk more with Yuzu-san! I want to go places with Yuzu-san! And I want to fulfill her brother’s wish! I don’t want to leave her!

But the alarm showed no mercy and kept ringing...

Is there nothing I can do? If we have to part, what should I do?”

“Yuzu-san, please listen to me carefully!”

“R-Right!” she stammered.

At the least, I had to get this out. “I think... this might be goodbye.”

“What...?” Her face froze. She collapsed like a leaf onto the floor.

“Thank you so much for everything!” I burst out.

This isn’t good. I’m going to cry. But, I’m a man... I can overcome this.

“Please, tell me this is some kind of joke.”

“This is no joke. This is what happened when we travelled through time before.”

“Oh, no! Please, please tell me it’s not true!”

I wished it weren’t true myself.

“Gin-san, you told me I wouldn’t be alone anymore, remember?”

Odaira-sensei had disappeared.

When Yuzu-san saw it happen, she was taken aback for a second, but as she realized we were leaving, her expression wavered. Tears began to well up in her eyes.

Yuzu-san, please don’t make that face!

“No! I don’t want you to go!” she exclaimed.

“Yuzu-san...” Miru disappeared next.

“You are going away, aren’t you?” Crying, she quickly walked over to the wall. “Gin-san, this is a message from me!” She pointed her finger at the wall and began to draw a symbol.

It was a word. She was writing a word on the wall! I looked carefully at what she was writing. I had to burn this into my brain!

好き

It was two characters. The second character was the hiragana “ki,” I was pretty sure. But I didn’t understand the first character. *Was it a kanji?* Trying to figure out the writing on the wall was hard enough.

“Yuzu-san, please just tell me in words!”

“Tell you? But... you’re going to disappear!”

Ah, this is all too much! I can’t handle it!

“Yuzu-san, please! Tell me what it is that you wrote!”

“It’s a secret.”

Just when I was about to open my mouth again to beg, I lost consciousness.

We had returned to the 23rd century.

When I came to, the four of us were in Odaira-sensei’s living room. It was 6:05 PM. I couldn’t remember precisely, but I was pretty sure it was about the time it had been when we had time traveled before. In other words, we had returned to the precise moment when we had left.

Nothing was different from when we had left. Odaira-sensei had returned to being an elderly gentleman, and when my sisters and I returned home, our parents welcomed us home as if nothing had happened.

We slipped easily back into the swing of the 23rd century. After two days, I had a dream the second night... I think it was a dream of Yuzu-san.

For me, my biggest memory of the 21st century was most definitely Yuzu-san.

She was the first person in the 21st century I had spoken to, and she was very beautiful and kind. She made me a whole lot of home-cooked meals, and was my classmate at school.

I'll never see Yuzu-san again...

But I could still remember her.

I sat down in my room, and looked at the cover of the current-day edition of *Oniaka*. Homyura Taitei was smiling at me, an almost exact copy of Yuzu-san. The illustration was a little stylized, but it was basically exactly like her. Of course her face and hairstyle were the same, but she also wore the exact katyusha that Yuzu-san had loved so much.

I wonder what the connection is between Yuzu-san and Homyura?

Yuzu-san had done so much for me, but I had barely repaid her at all before we returned to our time period. I felt so guilty...

Did she manage to fulfill her brother's wish? I bet after that, she kept trying her best. And what was that final message, I wonder?

When I thought about Yuzu-san, my chest panged with the feeling of loss. I knew it was pitiful, but I could tell I was turning inward. As I became overcome with sentiment, I heard a knock at my door and lifted my head.

"Onii-chan, can I come in?"

Kuroha came in my room. She sat down on my bed, and looked down at me with a serious expression. I suspected she had something she wanted to talk about.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I've been curious about something since we got back, so I did some research."

"Curious about something?"

"About that..." She pointed at the copy of *Oniaka* I was holding. "Homyura is Yuzu-san," she said, suddenly, as if some kind of great detective announcing her brilliant deduction.

"Hey, wait... You just noticed they looked identical now? I realized that a long

time ago.”

“Not that. What I mean is that Homyura the character was based on Yuzu-san,” she continued sounding very confident.

What makes her so confident?

“Onii-chan, look at this,” she said as she held out a sheet of paper. It was a printout from an encyclopedia page from the Internet. I could read the title “Kurona Gura.”

“The author of *Oniaka*, Kurona Gura, lived his entire life in the heart of TOKYO, but it seems that during a writing slump, he moved. It says he wanted to change his mood.”

“Moved? Where to?”

“Read.” She pointed to the top of the page.

I followed her finger to the line “He moved to a Western mansion that was put up for sale in OKUTAMA.”

Wait... A Western mansion in OKUTAMA? It couldn’t be...Yuzu-san’s house!

My eyes went wide, and I looked up at Kuroha. “Is the Western mansion in OKUTAMA they are talking about...?”

“Yes. It’s Yuzu-san’s house, I think. I bet that Gura saw a picture of Yuzu-san.”

In the back of my mind, the picture of Homyura and Yuzu-san overlapped perfectly. *Homyura was based on Yuzu-san!* My beloved heroine was based on another girl that was very special to me! Was there any greater happiness?

“Kuroha, thank you for telling me this. It makes me really happy!”

“That’s not all. I found out something else very important.” Kuroha was calm and composed, in comparison to how excited I was. It seemed like Great Detective Kuroha’s deductions weren’t over yet. “*Oniaka* might have had a book that it was based on.”

“That it was based on?” I had never heard a theory like that. *Oniaka* had been a completely original story by Gura. He had said publicly that no other work had influenced him.

“Yuzu-san said she would treasure it, remember?” said Kuroha. I didn’t follow what she was getting at. “You know, we all helped make it...”

After I couldn’t answer, Kuroha got an exasperated look on her face.

“*Ani MAJI Mania*! The story is a lot like *Oniaka*, you know?”

“I wasn’t able to read it, so I don’t really know...”

“You at least got the gist of the story, right?” she asked.

Ah, that’s true.

The parts about the adopted older brother and younger non-blood-related sister were the same as *Oniaka*.

“Gura must have found the box with *Ani MAJI Mania* and the picture of Yuzu-san in it,” continued Kuroha. “After we came back, I reread *Oniaka*. The story is very similar. I’m almost sure that he used *Ani MAJI Mania* as a basis for it.”

The more Kuroha talked, the more it made sense to me. If Gura had found Yuzu-san’s picture, it wasn’t a stretch to think that he had also found *Ani MAJI Mania*’s manuscript. However...

“Wait, then he plagiarized? Gura would never have done something like that. I mean, if that’s true, then a plagiarized book became one of the most famous books in all literature!”

“It wasn’t an exact copy, and who could have known it would have gained such popularity, right?”

Well, she has a point. But I still am not sure whether I want to believe it. I had mixed feelings, but with the next thing Kuroha said, any doubts were blown away.

“If it’s true, then the wishes of Yuzu-san’s brother really did become true, even if it was in another form.”

I was stunned into silence. *Oniaka* was the work that had given birth to the root of the Orthodox style. It had had an incredible impact on all of Japanese culture. It had been primarily responsible for the spread of moe.

Yuzu-san’s brother’s wish transcended time and came true!

“Now that’s a wonderful tale!”

“I know, right?” Kuroha smiled. “There’s no definitive proof, but thinking about it this way, it’s pretty wonderful, you know?”

“Sometimes you say some pretty great things,” I said.

Kuroha responded with, “What do you mean, ‘sometimes’?” and chuckled.

I suddenly wanted to read *Oniaka* with a burning passion. I opened the book and turned the pages.

I thought Kuroha was going to leave, but she asked me looking over my bed “Onii-chan, Homyura was your first love, wasn’t she?”

I panicked a little. “How did you know...?”

“You are a lot easier to understand than you think you are.”

I-I am...? I was a little shocked.

There was nothing strange about falling in love with a 2D girl. In the current day, it was quite commonplace. But it was still embarrassing to have your little sister see through your first love.

While I had my defenses down, Kuroha asked me a strange question. “What part of Homyura did you fall for more? A: Her personality. B: Her looks.”

Her looks or her personality? They were both awesome, but if I had to choose...

“The thing I fell for the most was her pure feelings for her older brother, so I guess that means A, her personality.”

“I see.” Kuroha nodded, seeming to be pleased with that answer.

“Homyura didn’t show it on the outside usually, but in her heart she was always thinking about her big brother. That was why she stuck so close to him, and why it seemed like she made everything he did her own purpose in life. She would fiercely deny that she was romantically in love, but in the last scene, she is finally honest with herself. That’s what I liked about her.”

“Y-Yeah.”

“Was the heroine in *Ani MAJI Mania* the same type of person?”

“I don’t think she was that similar...”

“I see. And it’s not like *Ani MAJI Mani* had that line in it, right?”

“That line?” asked Kuroha.

“Homyura’s famous quote.”

“What’s that?”

If you are talking about Homyura’s famous quote, there can only be one:

“‘I want to have Onii-chan’s baby,’” I said.

The main character of *Oniaka* was worried about not being related by blood to his family. Homyura realized this and said this line to him at the end of the book. Making a baby together meant they would be tying the main character to his family by blood. The brother and the sister would be partners and create a true family together. When I’d read that scene, I had been overcome with love for Homyura and cried.

“So? Was there a line like that in *Ani MAJI Mania*?” If there was, that would confirm that Gura had used it as a basis for *Oniaka*.

“Of course there wasn’t!” exclaimed Kuroha, who had gone quite red.

She’s got good circulation.

“Anyway, *Oniaka* took it way too far. There’s no way she could say something like, ‘Have my baby, Onii-chan!’”

That’s not true, Homyura says it! Well, she’s 2D, but...

“In *Ani MAJI Mania*, the last line is ‘I want to be together with you forever, Onii-chan!’” Kuroha went on.

“Ahh... Yuzu-san did want to be together with her brother until his death, didn’t she?” I replied with a somber tone, but Kuroha seemed annoyed.

“You can’t think of anything but Yuzu-san, can you?”

“I can’t help it, okay?” I said.

Kuroha looked down at me disapprovingly.

“I’d like to concentrate on reading *Oniaka* right now, so please go back to your

room," I told her in a tone like throwing out someone bothering me.

Kuroha didn't seem to like that. "Suit yourself. I was going to tell you the word that Yuzu-san wrote on the wall, but I guess I won't. I'll never tell you, ever."

"What?!" I stood up, and approached Kuroha. *She read the word that Yuzu-san wrote back then?!* "Please, tell me! I'm begging you!"

"No way. Yuzu-san knew you couldn't read it, and that's why she wrote it that way."

"Don't tease me like this. I tried looking it up in a dictionary, but I couldn't remember what the character was anymore."

"...I'm not going to do it for you."

"Please, don't say that. Is it *chikan*? *Chijo*? *Doutei*? *Kan'u*? What was it?!"

"None of those!"

In the end, Kuroha wouldn't tell me. She scolded me, insisting that if I was so concerned about things that had ended, I should be writing a novel instead.

Things that had ended... It saddened me to think of it like that, but Kuroha was right, after all.

One month had passed since we had returned to the 23rd century. During that time, the two literary prizes I was interested in had their results announced: The Newcomer's Prize and the Homyura Prize.

My submission to the Newcomer's Prize had not been selected, unfortunately. My novels still had a lot of maturing to do, it seemed. It was frustrating for me, but my determination was not dented. I immediately began work on my next book. I would keep submitting until I won the prize if it took me ten, or even twenty times!

As for the second result, the Homyura Prize...

We were going to see Odaira-sensei after quite a while. I took Kuroha and Miru along, and we headed to his house. I had kept up by email, but this would be the first face-to-face encounter since we had gone to the 21st century.

He guided us to the terrace instead of the living room because he said there

was a nice breeze. The four of us sat around the table with an umbrella.

“Odaira-sensei, we have something we want to talk about,” I said. We explained to him about how we thought *Oniaka* had been based on *Ani MAJI Mania*.

When we did, he chuckled and laughed. “That’s the conclusion I reached, as well. *Ani MAJI Mania* became *Oniaka*, and was read by later generations. It’s a nice story, you know? Yuzu-san’s feelings for her brother changed form, and reached her target.”

I didn’t know who this “target” was that Odaira-san was referring to. Kuroha blushed slightly and averted her eyes, so perhaps she knew.

“Onii-chan, there’s something more important we came for, remember?” Kuroha reminded me.

“Oh, right,” I said.

It’d be better for Miru to give it, I think. But when I called her name and prompted her, she didn’t respond. Miru was staring over at a hedge in the corner of the yard.

“Miru, what is it?” I asked.

“I feel someone watching.”

“Watching?” I looked over to the hedge. There didn’t seem to be anything amiss, but...

“Miru-chan must mean there is a brazen voyeur, I’m sure!” Odaira-sensei declared.

Mriu turned innocently to Kuroha. “Nee, what’s a voyeur?”

“Sheesh, stop teaching her those types of words, Sensei!” Kuroha yelled, exasperatedly.

“Miru, do you still feel like someone is watching?” I asked.

“No.”

“Okay, then do the thing.”

On my word, Miru pulled out a bouquet of flowers. “Congratulations, Geezer.

Keep it up.”

“Ooh, flowers from Miru-chan! Can I have you as well, as part of a combo?” The victory crown for the Homyura Prize sparkled on top of Odaira-sensei’s head.

Usubi had been the favorite in the press, but when the prize was announced, it had been Odaira-sensei’s *LILSIS☆STAR* that had won. The orthodox had beaten out the blasphemous.

“It’s all thanks to you that literature was saved, Sensei. I’m so glad that *Usubi* didn’t win the prize,” I told him.

That strange Japanese, and the story with no moe at all... It wasn’t appropriate for the Homyura Prize.

“Hahaha. So I was the one who protected literature, you think?” Odaira-sensei laughed half-heartedly. “Gin-kun, ever since I went to the past, my thinking has changed. I would have been even more pleased if *Usubi* had won the Homyura Prize this time.

“Huh?”

“Think back to the 21st century.”

I wondered what Odaira-sensei was trying to say.

“Back then, moe was not yet accepted like it is in the current day.”

“That’s right.”

“But the roots had already begun to blossom. It was just before they took full bloom.”

I started to remember the city streets of the 21st century and the television programs. The amount of moe was very slight compared to what there was in the current day.

“Gin-kun, do you remember that literature club president?” he asked.

I once again remembered her face. “I think she was an extremely inflexible person who was fixed in her ways and thinking.”

“I see. But it wasn’t so strange for that era, don’t you think?”

“It’s true that the difference in time periods was considerable, but she

disregarded moe offhandedly, and was extremely narrow-minded."

"Indeed. Then it's important that we not become like her, yes?"

...! I felt like I had been slapped across the face.

"You told her yourself, didn't you, Gin-san? 'You're just judging a book by its cover!'"

I see now! I've treated Usubi *no differently from that club president! I was only looking at that work's cover. I thought it was worthless just because it didn't have value in my eyes.*

"Isn't it better to have a variety of things? People create things. There is no 'high-brow' or 'low-brow' when it comes to that passion. And the feelings that are contained in those works are extremely precious."

"Sensei!" I cried.

He's so right! I don't want to be a person who is stubborn and can't accept new things. I must be more flexible and open minded! Profound! Sensei, I'll follow you for all my life!

I knelt upon the ground. Truly this was a person who should be gazed up at from below! To look him straight in the eye was rude beyond compare.

Odaira-sensei shone. I don't mean he actually emitted light, of course. I meant it was as if he looked like... *Wait. Sensei is actually actually starting to flash...*

"To think I could be awakened to a whole new world at my age..."

The flashing light became faster and faster into a continuous glow. *So bright!* I covered my eyes with my arms.

When the light died down, Odaira-sensei had turned into a blonde, twin-tailed little girl. He had awakened indeed. He looked just like he had the entire time we'd been in the 21st century.

"S-Sensei..."

"So, like... I can transform at will now, see? I think I'll stay this way for a while."

This was beyond comprehension! I was so dumbfounded, I stood up without thinking.

“I have awakened my true *Way of the Little Sister*. In other words, I have become my own little sister.”

His own little sister, like as in jimai? He’s going to go from being “Gimai Odaira” to being called “Jimai Odaira”!

“Okay, let’s get to it, then. Onii-sama, Onii-samaaaa!” Odaira-sensei buried himself in my stomach.

“Back off, geezer,” said Miru, immediately trying to pry us apart.

“Miru-chan, don’t be so mad. I’ll give you marshmallows,” said a smiling Odaira-sensei, trying to calm Miru down.

At the mention of marshmallow, Miru seemed to look happy. She was placated in an instant.

“Speaking of which...” Odaira-sensei seemed to have remembered something. “I figured out what caused us to travel through time.”

...Whaaaaaat?! I’m shocked! For real?

“It was the marshmallows,” he said.

“Marshmallows... You mean the small white sweet snacks we ate? Those marshmallows?” I asked, stunned.

“Yes, those marshmallows. Think back. We all ate the marshmallows right before we traveled through time, remember?”

Now that he mentioned it, I realized it was true. Both the time when we had travelled to the 21st century and the time when we had come back, we had eaten the marshmallows right beforehand.

“So something happens to us that makes us travel through time whenever we eat marshmallows?”

“No, only with those special marshmallows. They were sent from a scientist friend of mine. It seems like they allow you to travel through time.”

Scientist? Could it be...

“Is it Professor Choumabayashi?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s her.”

I remembered the first day I had met Odaira-sensei. He had spoken on the phone with Professor Choumabayashi.

“They allow you to go to any place and time you wish,” he explained. “She told me something about wormholes and singularities and whatnot, but I’m not a specialist in that field and didn’t really understand.”

“Then, the marshmallows we ate in the past...?”

“They were the ones I had given Miru as a present.”

I see. Miru had Sensei’s marshmallows in her bag when we went back in time.

“That’s nuts. Why didn’t you tell us something important like this earlier?” asked Kuroha, critically.

“I realized it only after we had come back here. I had missed an email I got from Choumabayashi-kun. Those marshmallows were a present for my birthday, it seems.”

“What the hell is she doing giving you a weird birthday present like that?” Kuroha asked in disbelief.

“Oh, it was a present. The email said I could use the marshmallows to go back and meet my first love, but my first love wasn’t 3D.”

“And the way you look now? Is that also thanks to the marshmallows?”

“It’s a side effect that happens to people older than 65.”

“What, is it based on your pension eligibility?” Kuroha laughed bitterly.

I began to laugh too, but Miru asked a question. “Nii, are you gonna go over there to play again?”

“Go play?”

“At Yuzu’s place. We could go with the marshmallows.”

Ah, that’s right! If we ate the professor’s marshmallows, we could travel through time. I could meet Yuzu-san again! I was almost going to explode with glee...

“They’re all gone,” said Odaira-sensei, sadly. “And they’re quite difficult to make, it seems.”

Oh, no... So disappointed... Like, totally disappointment city. My shoulders slumped as much as they could.

There wasn't anything that could be done. They were almost like magic, after all, so making them must take an incredible amount of time and money. I couldn't be so selfish and think only of myself. I didn't want to give up, but right now, it was...

I was about to crush the hope that once again had risen within me, and I shook my head slightly.

Yuzu-san...

plop

A strange sound came from the edge of the yard.

What was that? We looked over at where the sound had come from.

It was a person. A person had collapsed on the grass on the yard. A girl, by the look of it.

I could see that she was blonde and was wearing a black katyusha. She had on a school sweater and a pleated skirt. *Isn't that the uniform for Hakumei Academy?*

My heart lept.

I remembered that girl. In fact, I had been thinking about her just now!

"Yuzu-san?!" I ran over to her, and grabbed her in my arms.

She had her eyes closed, and she groaned "Unn..."

"Yuzu-san, Yuzu-san!" After I shook her, she regained consciousness.

"...Gin-san...?"

"Yes, it's me."

She slowly opened her eyes, and began to focus.

"Gin-san!" Fully awake, she threw her arms around my neck and held me tight.

W-W-Whoa there, Yuzu-san! I could feel her soft body through her clothes, and it was getting me excited.

“I wanted to see you again, Gin-san, so I...” Scattered around Yuzu-san were marshmallows and a plate.

Yuzu-san must have eaten one of the marshmallows! And not only that, she took the rest of them with her! Good job, Yuzu-san! I was so proud of her, tears started to well up in my eyes.

“I... I was so lonely, I thought I was going to die...”

“I’m sorry. I won’t leave you alone again.”

“Right! It’s a promise!” She hugged me even tighter. We embraced, and I could feel her soft, warm body.

Ah, this is actually real. I was able to see Yuzu-san again! I’ll never let you go!

“Hold it!” Someone was pulling on my arms from behind. It was Kuroha. And she was pulling pretty damn hard.

I let go of Yuzu-san.

“Enough with the clinginess,” Kuroha said. “We need to check whether she’s hurt or not.”

“R-Right. Yuzu-san, are you okay?”

“Yes.” She stood up and stretched her legs. There didn’t seem to be any problems with her physically.

“Hey, Yuzu-kun. We blonde girls need to stick together, right?” Odaira-sensei pulled on his twin-tails, as if showing off his hair to Yuzu-san.

“Oh, hello, Sensei.”

“This time, it’s our turn to take care of you.”

“You will?”

“Of course. What would you like to do, Yuzu-kun? Do you want to live here?”

In other words, did she want to give up her life in the 21st century and live here in the 23rd century? It must not have been an easy decision for her, but Yuzu-san showed no hesitation at all in her answer.

“Yes!”

“H-Hey. Can you really just say that? What about your parents?” Kuroha seemed a bit nervous.

“My parents would be glad that I was gone. I mean, I’m thankful that they raised me and all, but...” Yuzu-san trailed off for a moment, and then continued, “but there is something more important to me here,” with confidence.

Perhaps it was my imagination, but I thought that Yuzu-san had glanced over at me when she said that.

Kuroha winced a little bit, but replied with, “I see.”

“As long as we have the marshmallows we can go back whenever we want, so there’s no reason to think so hard about it,” added Odaira-sensei lightheartedly.

If an adult like Sensei could think it was the right decision, then Yuzu-san should feel confident.

“Gin-san, I’m in your care now.”

“Yes! I’ll do my best.”

Yuzu-san stood in front of me and bowed deeply. I bowed in return, but jerkily, as I was strangely embarrassed for some reason.

But then, Miru tugged on my clothes. “Nii, is Yuzu-san gonna come to our house?”

“I hope so. But we’ll have to convince Mom and Dad.”

“Feel free to use my house if you’d like,” said Odaira-sensei, but Kuroha was against it.

“I wouldn’t want even Yuzu-san to have to live together with Sensei. She can come live with us. That’s for the best.”

“Better to keep a close eye on them, right, Nee?” added Miru.

“That’s not it. I’m just worried about her well being, that’s all!” Kuroha dismissed Miru’s statement quite forcefully.

Yuzu-san had not been able to sit still this whole time, and was looking at me on and off. I realized that Yuzu-san wasn’t carrying anything with her at all.

“In any case, it looks like we will have a bit of moving to do, I think. Is there

anything you need from your house, Yuzu-san?”

“Yes. Like my jersey and my apron...”

“Yuzu-kun, I have a humble request to make of you. Could you find it in your heart to allow me to bring me your used *randoseru*?” asked Odaira-sensei.

“My *randoseru*? I think I still have it, so sure.”

Odaira-sensei’s eyes lit up. “I shall go and help you. I must get that treasure without a second’s delay!”

“I’ll go and help, too,” I said.

“Miru will go!” said Miru.

We all said we’d go, but Kuroha threw cold water on the plan. “Aren’t the marshmallows really precious? We can’t just use them so casually.”

“Well, they are precious, but look at how many we have!” I looked at the plate of marshmallows Yuzu-san had, and saw it was piled high. I showed it to Kuroha.

“...Fine, then.” Kuroha gave in, defeated.

“Then it’s moving time, or rather, moving-through-time time!”

☆

Yes, even I was completely amazed by what I had witnessed.

Odaira had transformed into a little girl, barely weened from her mother’s breast, and then another girl had appeared out of thin air. Based on what I had seen before my own eyes, though yet mere conjecture, I could believe that their story had not been a lie.

Odaira had said, “Ever since I went to the past, my thinking has changed.”

Could he have been any more arrogant? It was nothing but the majority taking pity on the minority! Despicable, the lot of them.

And that brat, with his uniform clearly out of place in this time, really gets my gut. He seemed oh so jovial surrounded by all his little girls. The worst of all was how he was so beloved by his little sisters.

Take my own little sister, for consideration. Could anything in this world be a more unfair comparison?

No, it matters not anymore. Nor do I need to blackmail Odaira. For I have obtained some crucial information. I must thank the fools for spilling their secrets outdoors.

I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby — Just saying the name of the book makes me ill. The contents were the most banal as they come, but its effect on the world was enormous. And it was a turning point not just for literature, but for our entire culture.

What if something else had been born from this turning point instead?

Until a moment ago, I could never have imagined such a possibility. But their conversation has laid open a new path before me. All I need is to do something to that manuscript which became the basis for the novel. I, yes I, shall correct the culture of Japan. I shall restore the great will of my ancestors, and the world shall once again recognize my own talent.

I can obtain for myself that small white confection. And then, what I must do is clear. Now is the time when I do my duty to change fate.

Now, we rebel!

Chapter 5 - Stories Transcend Time

We travelled through time once again to Yuzu-san's house. The first thing she did was to write a letter to her parents. Odaira-sensei suggested she write that she was going "on a long journey."

As in, life is an endless journey? Sensei sure is a poet!

After that, we all went to Yuzu-san's room and helped with the moving. It didn't take long to collect all her things. Yuzu-san really wasn't very picky about what she was bringing, and we managed to fit everything into a single suitcase.

"And then, before I forget..." Yuzu-san took out a red book bag from the back of the closet. "Sensei, here you go! My *randoseru*."

"Ooooooooooooh!" Odaira-sensei was on cloud nine. He immediately put on the *randoseru* and began running around the center of the room with his arms outstretched like an airplane. It was like he was still a kid on the inside. He was actually kind of cute.

"Okay, now it's Miru-chan's turn!" he said. "Put on the *randoseru*!"

"No. It'll just get in the way."

"Please, just do it! If it's getting in the way, then you can just take off your clothes instead, okay?" Odaira-sensei pleaded to Miru with both hands clasped.

It's rare to see Sensei this desperate.

"Miru, this might help Sensei with his work. Just put it on," I said.

"...If you say so, Nii." Miru put on the *randoseru*.

Odaira-sensei's eyes went bloodshot and bulged out of his head when he saw Miru. "Th-Th-This must be captured for posterity! Yuzu-kun, do you have a camera, perhaps?"

"I think my brother had one. Please wait here." Yuzu-san left the room. After a little bit, she returned holding a square black camera. It seemed like a polaroid that he used when playing "little piggy."

When Odaira-sensei took a picture with it, the camera spit out the photo immediately. He grabbed it without hesitation. “Hahhh... I can’t get enough... I think I might be turning...”

Odaira-sensei put the photo up to his cheek, and then grabbed a pen on top of the desk. After confirming the date and time, her wrote them on the white margin of the photo.

201X/6/17 3:33 PM Taken by Onii-chan (currently in body of girl)

“Today was Miru-chan’s first time. How bittersweet. Why doesn’t everyone write something?” asked Odaira-sensei.

“Honestly, I don’t even know what to say,” Kuroha said, staring at Odaira-sensei with exasperation, but her expression changed and she looked toward the corner of the room. Following her gaze, I saw a silver box laying on the floor.

It was Yuzu-san’s treasure box.

Kuroha asked Yuzu-san for permission, and then opened the box to look at what was inside.

“Kuroha, what are you looking so intently at?” I asked.

“Yuzu-san’s picture and the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania*. Both of these are crucial for what will become *Oniaka*. I want to make sure that Gura writes it, after all.”

“Um, what was *Oniaka* again?” asked Yuzu-san. “Gin-san said something about it before, I think.”

“The full title is *I Want to Have Onii-chan’s Baby,* and —” Kuroha explained, but Yuzu-san suddenly interjected in a loud voice.

“Kuroha-san, I didn’t think you’d say such a thing already!”

“What? No, it’s a novel, a novel! That’s the book’s title!”

“Oh, yes, that’s right. Sorry, I got a little anxious there.” For some reason Yuzu-san seemed relieved.

Okay! We’re all ready, so it’s about time to go back.

“Miru, you’ve got the marshmallows?” I asked.

Miru nodded, and took them out of her backpack. I took one from her, and was about to eat it.

Hmm? I felt like someone was looking at me from behind in the hallway. After looking around, everyone was in front of me. *Then who was it I felt looking at me?*

I turned around, but no one was there, just an empty hallway. We were the only ones here, so perhaps it was just my imagination.

“Nii, what’s wrong?” asked Miru.

“Nothing.” I popped a marshmallow into my mouth.

We returned to the 23rd century. When I regained consciousness, I was in Odaira-sensei’s living room.

I must have begun to get used to time travel, because I was barely out at all. Humans are very adaptable creatures. However, Yuzu-san had time travelled three times in rapid succession, and it seemed to have taken a toll on her. Odaira-sensei suggested that we take a rest on the couch, and we all plopped down.

I was worried about Yuzu-san, but when I looked at her, she smiled energetically at me.

“I’m going to be living in the same time period as you from now on, Gin-san.”

“Yeah. There are plenty of things you can’t get in the 21st century here. For instance — Sensei, I’d like to let her read *Oniaka*. Could I borrow a copy?”

“Sure. I’ll bring it here,” said Odaira-sensei, and he left the living room. I figured he was going to get the book from his library.

“The heroine of *Oniaka* is named Homyura, you see. I bet you’ll be really surprised when you see her picture, Yuzu-san.”

“Why?”

“Just wait, and you’ll see.”

“She’s a girl that Onii-chan really got into, you know...” added Kuroha.

“Oh, my... So if I look at her, I’ll be able to find out what Gin-san’s type is?”

Is that the case? Homyura looked exactly like Yuzu-san, but her personality was different. She was a little loud-mouthed and not honest with herself.

“Gyahhhhhhhhh!”

Wh-Wh-Wha...?

Without warning, a scream rang out from the hallway. *Was that Sensei’s voice?*

Immediately afterward, I heard the sound of footsteps running down the hall, and Odaira-sensei dashed into the living room.

“L-Look at this!” Sensei brought out a book as he sat down on the couch.

A girl that looked like Yuzu-san was on the cover. At first I thought it was *Oniaka*, but I was wrong. The picture was a lot more plain and simple. I would almost call it cold.

The book was titled 星辰 *(seishin/the stars).*

I can’t read it.

Odaira-sensei flipped through the pages, and we looked inside.

The innumerable stars twinkled in the sky, bathing the land in their light.

My heart churned with such force, I could do naught but stand there, motionless.

The wind bellowed and blew, but I was not cold. It was just an all-too-familiar, unwelcome wind accosting my cheeks.

“I can’t read it at all... Is this modern literature, perhaps?”

“This book has replaced my copy of *Oniaka*. I’ve never seen it before.”

“And *Oniaka* wasn’t there?”

“No.”

“Geezer’s finally lost it,” said Miru.

“It wasn’t just *Oniaka*... More than half of the books on my bookshelves have changed. Most of them now have kanji in their titles.”

That was yet another odd aspect of this. I tried to think of the cause.

“Perhaps while we were in the past, someone came and replaced all those books you had on your bookshelves? Like some modern literature publisher with a chip on their shoulder?”

I was pretty confident in my deduction, but Kuroha dismissed it easily. “That can’t be it.”

“Then, why?”

“Well...” Even Kuroha wasn’t able to come up with an answer. However it took only a moment until she started to put the pieces together.

“Sensei, can I double-check something? When we returned from the past, the contents of the books had all suddenly changed, right? You’re sure of that?”

Odaira-sensei nodded yes.

Kuroha was silent for a few seconds, but then spoke up again. “I have an idea, but... could it really be true...?”

“So you have come to the same conclusion, Kuroha-kun?” Odaira-sensei met eyes with Kuroha.

“But, I can’t believe it...”

“This state of affairs has been written about in novels old and new, far and wide...” he said.

Hmm? Sensei and Kuroha are the only ones who know what they’re talking about. What did he mean, “state of affairs”?

“I’m scared to go look outside,” said Odaira-sensei.

Kuroha stood up unsteadily, her face pale.

“I’m going to look!” she said, and dashed out from the living room, her skirt whipping around. She seemed to be headed to the front door.

She looks pretty upset about something. I wonder what it is? As I wondered, Kuroha’s voice rang out from the entrance.

“Onii-chan, come here!” cried Kuroha in a voice that cut through the air. It was a tone that I almost never heard from her.

I began to panic.

I sprang up and rushed toward the entrance. Kuroha was standing there with the door open, pointing to the outside.

“What’s wrong?”

“Look at this!” Kuroha led me out of Odaira-sensei’s house.

That was when I saw it...

薬 (drug).

本 (book).

美容室 (beauty parlor).

Those are kanji, right?

The signs in the city had kanji on them. And not one or two of them... They were on, like, almost all of them!

Wh-What the hell is this?! I couldn't believe my eyes. The city had completely changed. All the places you could see illustrations of pretty girls were gone.

I looked at the giant government billboard that was by the rotary, and the illustration of 2D Prime Minister Nyamo-chan had been replaced by a picture of some old guy wearing glasses. Even the message shown on the electronic scroll underneath had changed to "Live Together, Live Stronger: The Reason Party."

Dumbfounded, I watched as a small truck passed by with "Large-Sized Garbage Collection" written on its side. There was a head poking out of the back that I recognized.

It was *Magical Girl Sadie*. It was the life sized figure we had seen back in the past AKIHABARA. *I could read the "Garbage" part written on that truck... Could it be that they considered it garbage? A cultural artifact worth 50 billion yen?!*

I just stood there, motionless. Here was a world I didn't recognize. What possibly could have happened? Finally, my confused brain began to work, and I realized something about what I was seeing.

The buildings hadn't changed. Neither had the streets. The only change was the writing on the billboards and the signs.

Also, I couldn't see anything moe. It was almost like the city in the Heisei era.

"Nii, what's all this?" Miru asked. Everyone had followed us outside.

"Could we have travelled to the wrong time period?" I asked.

"No, it's not the wrong time. This is the year 2202," answered Kuroha. Odaira-sensei stood next to me and checked the date on his cellphone.

I couldn't believe it. "If it's 2202, then why are there kanji everywhere in the city?"

Odaira-sensei looked like he was thinking as hard as he could to come up with an answer. "Gin-kun, you've asked the right question. If we consider what happened with my bookshelves and the state of the city..."

"...there's a high chance that culture has changed," said Kuroha, finishing Odaira-sensei's thought.

That culture has changed?!

“Aha, I see.” I went ahead and agreed with a nod. We already had experience with traveling through time. At this point, no matter what happened, we shouldn’t think it too strange. Although it definitely came as a bit of a shock. That was for sure!

“Oniichan, you seem to be taking it well,” Kuroha said. “Do you understand what this means?”

I didn’t get what she meant.

“It’s your dream to become an author, remember?”

“Yup, that’s right!”

“If the words and culture have changed, then...” Kuroha wasn’t able to say anything further. She closed her lips and turned her face away from me.

I began to think about what Kuroha was trying to say. *If the words and culture have changed, then...*

Ackk! Could it be that the Orthodox style doesn’t exist?! In other words, my chance to debut as an author are now zero?!

“Kuroha, does this mean...”

When I looked toward her, she replied, “Oniichan, wait. We need to investigate further before jumping to conclusions. Sensei, can we use your internet?”

“Ah, yes. I’ll help with research, as well.”

Kuroha and Odaira-sensei went back in the house. Miru followed them.

“Um, Gin-san... I don’t really understand, but has something really bad happened?” Yuzu-san, who didn’t understand what was going on, had stayed outside with me.

Kuroha had told me to wait, but the answer was right in front of my face. I collapsed down on the ground, despondent. Before me was a 23rd century changed beyond all recognition.

I had decided to come back to the 23rd century and become an author while I was back in the 21st century. *But if the world in the 23rd century itself has*

changed, what should I do?

I wanted to write Orthodox style literature like *Oniaka*. That was my goal. *Is my dream impossible now? Even if I write amazingly creative panty shots, is this a world that won't accept them?*

This isn't what I wanted!

"Gin-san, are you okay? Gin-san!" Yuzu-san looked worriedly down at me, huddled in grief.

"Yuzu-san... Something very important to me, as well as my dream, may have disappeared."

"Something important to you, and your dream?"

"Yes..." I couldn't say any more.

I'm sorry... I can't really talk right now...

Yuzu-san looked at me for a bit without saying anything, but then she smiled her usual smile and excused herself before sitting down next to me.

"Gin-san, I'm not very good at talking," said Yuzu-san, holding my hand gently. I could feel the heat from her hands. It was warm.

We were shoulder-to-shoulder, and in a normal situation, my heart would have been beating a mile a minute, but this time was different. Surrounded by the kind and gentle sensation of Yuzu-san next to me, my feelings began to mellow.

Yuzu-san, thank you. Thank you for consoling me.

We clasped hands, sitting next to each other, staring off at the city.

After quite a bit of time had passed, I thought it was time to go back into Odaira-sensei's house.

"Um... You two know this is an emergency situation, right?" rang out a voice that sure made it sound like an emergency situation.

I could see two legs standing in front of me. They were clad in black stockings, and were beautifully shaped. Looking up, I saw Kuroha staring down at me with a none-too-pleased look on her face.

"The mystery has been solved. Come with me to the living room."

We all gathered in the living room, and the five of us sat around the table. It seemed like Kuroha had figured something out from her research on the internet. She said she was going to explain the situation we were in.

The Return of Great Detective Kuroha, is it now?

“Sensei and I have found the reason for why the culture has changed.”

“You already know? That seems fast.”

“Yeah. I’ve had a sneaking suspicion something like this might happen,” said Kuroha with conviction. “I’ll start with the conclusion: The reason that Japan’s culture has changed is that *Oniaka* was never written.”

I was speechless as Odaira-sensei nodded. Miru and Yuzu-san both looked confused.

“Nee, I don’t get it at all,” said Miru.

“Neither do I,” I said in agreement.

“Think back to the sequence of events. Oniichan, when was *Oniaka* revealed, and what kind of work was it?”

“Huh? It was revealed in 2060. And if you had to classify it, it was... a *gimai* book.”

“Think about what made it special. It used hiragana and katakana far more than previous novels, and it was what really broke moe into the mainstream.”

Kuroha was correct, but that was just stating the obvious.

“Think about it!” she insisted. “Writing words using katakana and hiragana, and moe illustrations of girls... Those are the two things that have changed about the current-day culture, right?”

“Now that you mention it, yeah.”

“You could even go so far as to say that the form of current-day culture was basically created by *Oniaka*, right?”

The form of current-day culture was created by it... Let me think about that.

“Um, so let me guess. It’s because of *Oniaka* that kanji have disappeared from current-day writing, and that the prime minister is a cute little 2D girl?” I asked.

“To put it simply, yes.”

“So then, if *Oniaka* never existed...”

“...culture would completely change.”

Hmm. I understand what she’s saying, but...

“Could history really have changed that much just because there was no *Oniaka*? I mean, Homyura is super-duper cute, but I don’t think it’s good if it had that kind of massive effect.”

“If it had only been *Oniaka*, you’d be right. *Oniaka* was just one drop rippling through history. But its DNA expanded throughout the world. One became two, two became four, four became eight... It came to affect all of Japan.”

I envisioned what Kuroha was describing in my mind, with a map of Japan painted black, being washed over into a lovely pink with just one droplet.

“Of course, it didn’t just take one or two years. But after more than 100 years, what do you think?”

“One became two... became a billion, perhaps.” This conversation suddenly became really high stakes.

Odaira-sensei went and took out a book.

“Gura wrote this book, *Seishin*, instead of *Oniaka*. It became a famous historical work. This world was changed so much thanks to the influence of *Seishin*.”

“What kind of book is it?”

“There isn’t a single panty shot or bathing scene. And it uses quite a lot of kanji compared to other contemporary works.”

It became clear to me that it was a completely different book from *Oniaka*.

Odaira-sensei continued, “If you were to put it in orthodox literary style terminology, you could say that our original world is the *Oniaka* route, and this new changed world is the *Seishin* route. I wonder if the main heroine has changed, too? Like it going from Kuroha-kun to Yuzu-kun, for example.”

Kuroha responded to that with a “Hah?” and a raised eyebrow, while Yuzu-san

let out an, “Oh, my...” sounding strangely happy.

“In that case, shouldn’t we call them the ‘Kuroha route’ and ‘Yuzu-san route’?” I asked, but Miru seemed displeased.

“What about the Miru route?” she demanded.

“Miru-chan is on the Odaira-oniichan route! See, *I’m* the heroine!” chirped Odaira-sensei.

“There you go again,” replied Kuroha, looking displeased and shaking her head side to side.

“In any case, calling them routes does make it easier to understand. The route split at some point like the letter Y in the year 2060. The future would change depending on whether *Oniaka* or *Seishin* was created. Oniichan, are you following this so far?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

“Okay, next. Why wasn’t *Oniaka* written, do you think?”

“His editor didn’t let him write it?”

“Gin-kun, I think you were trying to say something realistic, but you’re wrong. Gura was already a famous author by the year 2060. His editor would have done whatever he told them to. He had free creative reign.”

Kuroha shot a cold glance over at Odaira-sensei. “I bet the great author Gai Odaira can do whatever he wants, too, huh?”

“Kuroha-kun, I am nothing but a gentleman to my publisher. All I ask is for them to provide me with some special water for my health. Pool water that elementary school girls have been swimming in, that is.”

“Sensei, why don’t you rest your old bones permanently at an elementary school grounds? And I don’t mean move there, I mean be buried there. Soon.” Kuroha turned back to me. “So, Oniichan, why do you think that *Oniaka* wasn’t created?”

I have no idea.

Kuroha could tell I was stumped, so she said “There’s a hint right here on the

cover," and pointed at *Seishin*.

The title and author were printed on the book, *Seishin* by Kurona Gura, and there was an illustration of a blonde woman. I had already noticed this earlier, but she looked a lot like Yuzu-san.

"Um, that person on the cover looks a lot like me," said Yuzu-san.

"Yeah. Gura must have found your picture even when he wrote *Seishin*. The cover illustration is proof."

"Yuzu-san's picture just makes such an impression. I understand that feeling."

"Oh Gin-san, stop it, you..." said Yuzu-san, bashfully.

"Anyway! Think about how Gura could have found Yuzu-san's picture but not written *Oniaka*?"

"He wasn't in the mood?"

"That's not going to get us anywhere. Please try and think about it more logically. I think it's because he found the picture, but he didn't find the most important part."

The most important part?

"So in other words, it's not that he didn't write it. It's that he wasn't able to write it. He wasn't even able to conceive of it."

Ah, I see! I finally understood what she was trying to say. "Because the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania* wasn't there?"

"Yes."

"Why wasn't it there?"

"If the box itself had been gone, he wouldn't have found the picture. Since he did, that means it was only the manuscript that went missing, I think."

"So the box was there, but the manuscript wasn't inside of it," I concluded.

"If we think about that, it leads me to believe that it was stolen," she said.

We all looked at Kuroha.

Stolen? That's crazy!

“Well the manuscript didn’t grow legs and walk out of the box on its own, now did it?” she said.

“I’m sorry, everyone. This is all because I used an old *nori* container as the box,” Yuzu-san said.

Oh? It wasn’t some high-tech security box?

“This wasn’t your fault at all, Yuzu-san. If it was stolen, who could have been the culprit? Did you have a stalker?” I asked.

“In that case, it would have been the picture that was stolen,” Kuroha said.

She had a point.

We had ran out of things to say. If the manuscript had been stolen, their motives were just a complete mystery. Even if *Ani MAJI Mania* had actually been the basis for *Oniaka*, it didn’t have any monetary value on its own, since it wasn’t known to exist. We had no idea why anyone would have stolen it.

“Um, I don’t really know about this stuff, but could you go back and fix the world to the way it was?” asked Yuzu-san.

“...Yes, we can,” replied Kuroha.

Hearing those words I instinctively perked up. *Stop playing Great Detective and cut to the chase next time!*

“Sensei, if you please.”

Odaira-sensei nodded to Kuroha, and pulled out a picture from his pocket and set it on the table. It was the picture of Miru wearing the *randoseru* that they had taken in the past. Kuroha pointed to the white margin with her slim finger.

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“We’re going to go check that the manuscript was still in there at that time. We’ll go back right before then and think of a plan.”

“What kind of a plan?” I asked. Kuroha was smart, so she must have already been thinking of something.

“I dunno, but we’ve gotta think of something!” replied Kuroha, proving me wrong. “Oniichan, you want the world to go back to the way it was, right?”

“Well, sure.” This new world didn’t have *Oniaka* or the orthodox literary style in it. The Japanese that was used was also very different. To me, it was as if both my past and my future had been stolen from me.

“A world where you can’t smile... is a world that I will always hate, Oniichan. We’re going back to the past, and changing the world back!” said Kuroha, with conviction.

I can feel it welling up... I didn’t know how many brothers out there in the world had little sisters, but I was definitely a happy one. *Thank you, Kuroha!*

“Kuroha-kun doesn’t just want to change the world back for that reason alone, does she?” Odaira-sensei interrupted. “She researched the marriage laws, after all.”

“I was... just checking all the laws in general!”

“Gin-kun, can I have a moment?” Odaira-sensei walked over to me and leaned over into my ear. “A part of the laws are different, you see. Non-blood-releated brothers and sisters can’t get married anymore.”

“You there! No whispering!” yelled Kuroha.

“When you saw that, you seemed to react calmly, but I could tell how much you were fretting from the look on your face,” Odaira-sensei said.

“S-Shut up!”

“What are we talking about? I can’t get married to Nii anymore?” asked Miru.

“That’s right! You would never be able to marry Gin-kun... Hm?” Odaira-sensei paused, as if realizing something. Kuroha was also looking surprised.

I figured out what the problem was. Miru was supposed to have thought that I was her real brother. If we’d been related by blood, we wouldn’t have been able to get married even in our world. But she had said “anymore,” so...

“Miru... you knew?”

“Yup. Nii isn’t my real brother.”

I knew it! Miru had known all along!

Kuroha and I were still reeling, but Miru was calm as ever.

“I’m gonna marry Nii! So we’re gonna change the law back.”

Marry me? Miru must not understand what she’s talking about. She must have been playing house or something. It was cute, I suppose, but it seemed a little childish for a ten-year-old to be declaring they were going to marry someone.

“I’m gonna marry Nii and protect him from all the parasites!”

“Oh my, Miru-chan. And who are the parasites?” Yuzu-san smiled over at Miru. It was the same warm smile as usual, and perhaps it was my imagination, but I thought I detected a slight sharpness to her words.

“Even if you get the blessing of the world for Gin-kun to marry you, I will never allow it!” Odaira-sensei cried. “I’ll even become the enemy of the entire world if I have to! Now praise me, Miru-chan!” It seemed like Odaira-sensei was dead-set against Miru getting married.

“Shut it, geezer.”

“Wouldn’t you prefer the law not get changed back, Sensei?” I said. “That way, I could never marry Miru.”

“No, I also want the law changed back. A lot of my books end up with a brother marrying his non-blood-related sister.”

Kuroha looked exasperated. “A lot? Every single one of them ends with that!”

“And what about you, Kuroha-kun?” he asked. “Aren’t you aiming for that ending, as well?”

“I am not!”

What did he mean, “that ending?” Perhaps he meant that Kuroha, Miru, and Odaira-sensei all wanted to return to the past to restore the world.

Last up was Yuzu-san.

“Yuzu-san, we’re going back to the 21st century. You’ll come back with us, right?” I asked.

“Gin-san, do you really feel the need to ask?” replied Yuzu-san, looking put off.

“We don’t know what might happen, and so I just need to check that you are

doing this because you want to."

"Of course I'm going to come with you! The next time you ask me something like that, I'm gonna get angry!"

S-Sorry!

"Then that's five yeas, zero nays," said Kuroha, and everyone nodded.

We were all in agreement. We were going to take back our culture! And to do that, we were going to go back to the 21st century.

I was so excited, I could barely remember how depressed I had been a moment earlier. I couldn't wait!

"All right, everybody, let's get started!" I cried, standing up.

"Sheesh, you always get so raring to go once we decide on a course of action, Oniichan," Kuroha said.

Damn straight I am. Didn't everyone just agree to it? "Miru, produce the marshmallows!"

"Oh..." Miru took out the marshmallows from her bag, and passed them out to everyone. I popped mine immediately into my mouth. It wouldn't be long before we traveled through time.

"It'll be the fifth time for us. It's old hat to us now!" said Kuroha.

"Yes. But just in case, we should all hold on tight to Miru-chan so we don't get separated," suggested Odaira-sensei. He must have been extra concerned since he was the only one who had been separated the first time we time-traveled.

"Don't touch me," Miru said.

"Oh, well," said Odaira-sensei, giving up. "Then how about Gin-kun?" He put on his precious *randoseru* and hugged my right arm tightly. His twin-tails brushed up against my arm and tickled.

"Miru will, too!" Miru came up next to me and hugged my left arm tight. Her chest pressed up against my elbow. *Yup, still gloriously flat.*

"I'll go here." Yuzu-san stood up and embraced me from behind. Two soft objects pressed up against my back.

S-S-S-So big! I got so excited, blood started rushing to my head.

“Hurry up, Nee!” said Miru.

“No, I’m good,” replied Kuroha.

“I’ll be lonely if you’re separated from us...”

“...Fine, then.” Kuroha hesitated, but walked up to me head on and put her arms around my waist. Our cheeks almost brushed up against one another. Her breath was on my cheek, and it tickled a little. “I’m just doing this because everyone else is doing it.”

Kuroha... You say that, but you’re the one who is squeezing me the tightest, you know? Maybe t-too tight...? Oww...

I was surrounded on all sides. Everyone was nice and soft, but I wasn’t able to move at all, and it was a little tough to take.

“Gin-kun, you’re surrounded by little sisters on all four sides. I’m jealous of you.”

“Are you and Yuzu-san my little sisters?”

“I did ask you to be my big brother,” said Yuzu-san.

“I believe I told you that I had awoken my true *Way of the Little Sister* and become my own little sister, is that not true, Onii-sama?” said Odaira-sensei.

I see. I’m everyone’s big brother. In that case, I will guide you all, my little sisters!

We were heading to the time and date written on that picture, and I thought about Yuzu-san’s mansion.

“It’s like we’re going on a trip. I’m never been on a trip with such a big group before. This will be fun.”

“Since we have to go and all, it would be nice to go to a resort somewhere in the 21st century, you know?” Yuzu-san said.

“Miru wants to go, too!”

“Sounds nice. I like the ocean and a pool. I sometimes go swimming,” added Odaira-sensei.

“Hey! Stop thinking about strange things. What if it affects the time-traveling? We’re going to the past for a single purpose! Don’t forget that,” scolded Kuroha.

Pretty soon we all started to sound the beeping alarm and flash. We would soon be transcending the boundaries of time, and traveling to the 21st century.

The first time we had been sent back with no idea what was happening. The second time had just been to help Yuzu-san move. But this time was different. This time, we were going back for a very important mission.

In order to take back our old world, we would travel to the 21st century! I could feel the passion rising within me!

“Isn’t it strange, Sensei, going back and forth between time periods like this?”

“Yes, it is. But humans have been transcending time since long, long ago.”

Huh? I haven’t heard of any time machines before this...

As I was about to ask, Odaira-sensei winked at me playfully. “Stories, Gin-kun! Heartfelt stories can very simply transcend time.”

Heartfelt stories! He was exactly right. Truly great stories stay beloved for centuries. In Japanese literature, there’s the *Genji Monogatari*, *Nansou Satomi Hakkenden*, and my favorite, *I Want to Have Onii-chan’s Baby*. All of these great works have captured the hearts of readers across time periods.

“I said something profound! Miru-chan, give me a congratulatory kiss!” said Odaira-sensei.

“No way. I might catch something.”

“Catch something from this innocent little girl? Like what?”

“Like old man smell,” said Kuroha.

“Kuroha-kun, take a good look at me. If I am smelling at all, it must be the fragrance of my *randoseru*!”

“It probably has little Yuzu-san’s sweat and body oder steeped into it,” I added.

“Gin-san, you’re embarrassing me...”

“Onii-chan, don’t tell me he’s starting to rub off on you?!” Kuroha cried.

Of course I’m influenced by Odaira-sensei! He’s my favorite author, after all.

I was sure that his works would also become like the greats of our ancestors and be read for hundreds of years. I, too, wanted to write a story that will be read across eras. One that would move the hearts of a great many people.

What would I write to do that, I wondered?

Ah... I thought of a good idea that would make great material for a story! “I’m going to turn this experience into a novel one day!”

Going back and forth between time periods... that alone could be a pretty fun

story.

“Sounds interesting. When you have it finished, will you let me read it?” asked Yuzu-san.

“It might be difficult for someone from the past to appreciate my brother’s writing. It’s hard enough for even us to wrap our heads around it,” said Kuroha.

“Nii’s prose is only for chosen ones!” Miru cried.

“Gin-kun is definitely a high-level artiste, indeed.”

Thanks, everyone, for the compliments! Gosh, I’m starting to get embarrassed.

“So I wouldn’t be able to read it? That’s a shame,” said Yuzu-san.

If I could have allowed Yuzu-san from the 21st century to read my 23rd century Japanese writing, that would have been amazing. But there were just too many differences between current-day and modern Japanese. And it was not just following the prose; it would be too hard for her to understand the content.

“Maybe it’s not so easy for stories to transcend time, after all.”

Kuroha smiled, and then said something kind of deep. “That’s not true. Your little sister can read kanji. She can write kanji, too.”

I wonder what she meant by that? So if my prose can’t be understood by someone, it could be fixed by going through someone else? In other words...?

Translation.

Finally, the alarm grew louder, and we all traveled through time. Just before I disappeared, I thought I heard someone say something.

“Stories transcend time, so do your best, Onii-chan.”

Afterword

How do you do? I'm Takashi Kajii. I won the silver award in the Novel Japan Prize (Formerly the HJ Bunko Prize) competition, and this is my debut novel. It's kind of like a dream for me, but it's not a dream, is it? Nope.

So, you've all been reading *My Little Sister Can Read Kanji*, but when I submitted it for the prize it was called *Little Sister Can Read Kanji*. When I told this title to a good friend, this was their reaction:

"So it's a story about like a really young little sister who just finally managed to learn kanji? Or is it *Little Sisters Can Read Kanji* and a story about someone's little sister who has mental issues and can't learn kanji? Either way I can see like a big brother who just is super overprotective of his little sister."

I was shocked. *That* was the impression the title gave?! Since I knew what it was actually about, I had no idea what other people would think of the title. A story about a super young sister or sister with a learning disability and their overprotective older brother...?

Man, just writing this takes a whole bunch of courage and resolve. Yeah.

I need to move on to the usual newcomer "thank you" section! Thanks so much for everyone at the editing department and my editor H-sama, for giving me this chance. I will do my best to contribute positively to HJ Bunko.

I'm so grateful for the wonderful illustrations by Halki Minamura-sama. They were so incredibly close to what I was imagining, it was almost mysterious. Thank you!

And for all the other people involved, it's thanks to you that this book was actually released. Thank you!

Thanks to my best friend Y-san for all the advice, my family, my friends, and my acquaintances. And to you, the person reading this book, I give my greatest thanks of all! Things will be continued in volume two, so I'll see you there.

Until next time!

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My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 1

by Takashi Kajii

Translated by Samuel Pinansky Edited by Emily Sorensen

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